NOW 192 PAGES

ISAAC ASIMOV'S

APRIL 1985 $2.00

SCIENCE·FICTION·MAGAZINE

8 ERSARY ISSUE

L D

S IND

F

S

G ENFORD

G EC EFFINGER

[T

IA HLM22644W03 9JUL 85 1 03
WILLIAM E HOLMES
464 S 2ND ST
LINDENHURST NY 11757

VIEWPOINT

LOVE POTIONS

0 02648 04
387167

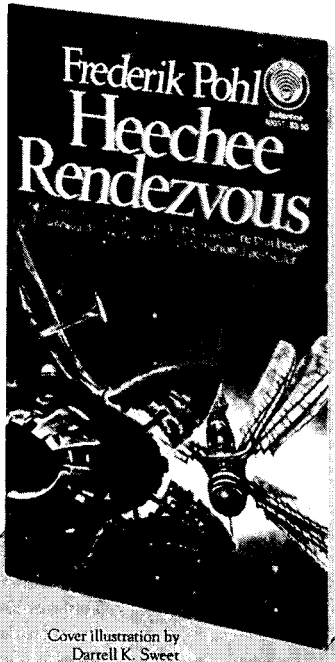
LICENSED TO LINZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Del Rey paperbacks

The amazing encounter that ends the story started in *Gateway*!

At last—the triumphant conclusion to the award-winning saga of Man's leap into interstellar space, where the all-powerful, ancient Heechee civilization intervenes to save Man from creatures who are redesigning the universe...

On Sale in April
$3.50

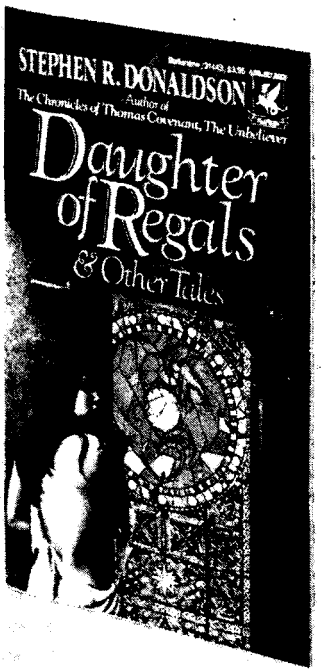


Cover illustration by
Darrell K. Sweet

Del Rey #1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you've been waiting for!



Cover illustration by
Michael Whelan

More magic from the author of *White Gold Wielder!*

By the #1 bestselling author of *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*, a superb collection of eight stories, and two novellas written especially for this volume. Also included is *Gilden-Fire*, a chapter that was part of the original manuscript of *The Illearth War*, but omitted from the published book.

On Sale in April
$3.95

Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FIVE-TWELFTHS OF HEAVEN

MELISSA SCOTT

As fine a pilot as any man, Silence Leigh was barred nonetheless from captaining her own ship – because she was *not* a man. A ship of her own and freedom from the Hegemony's oppression were only dreams – unless she joined the rebels at Wrath-of-God and risked losing the starlanes forever. *By the author of* The Game Beyond.

55952-4 · 352 pp. · $2.95

ALSO COMING IN APRIL FROM BAEN BOOKS:

Active Measures by Janet Morris and David Drake – The near-future high-tech thriller that offers $10,000 to the reader who best solves seven key questions!

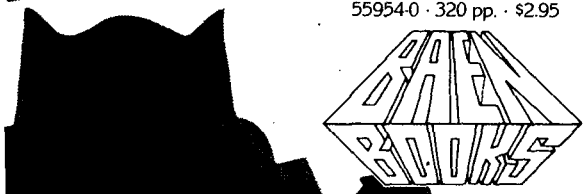
55945-1 · 384 pp. · $3.95

Love Conquers All by Fred Saberhagen – Newly revised and expanded!

55953-2 · 288 pp. · $2.95

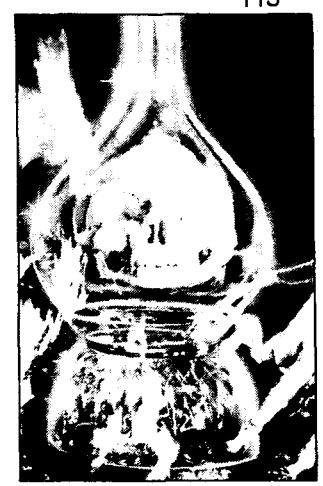
Far Frontiers Vol. II, edited by Jerry Pournelle and Jim Baen.

55954-0 · 320 pp. · $2.95



Distributed by
Simon & Schuster Mass
Merchandise Sales Company
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10020

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

Vol. 9 No. 4 (whole no. 90)
April 1985
Next issue on sale
April 9, 1985

Novella

126 How the Wind Spoke at Madaket — Lucius Shepard

Novelette

96 Beneath the Shadow of her Smile — Alexander Jablokov

Short Stories

46 Time's Rub — Gregory Benford
62 Klein's Machine — Andrew Weiner
78 The Beast from One-Quarter Fathom — George Alec Effinger
113 Deathglass — Lee Killough

Departments

4 Editorial: Dialog — Isaac Asimov
9 Letters
17 Mooney's Module — Gerry Mooney
18 Gaming — Dana Lombardy
22 Bar Bets on the Bagel — Martin Gardner
24 Viewpoint: Love-Potions — Tom Rainbow
182 On Books — Baird Searles
192 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Poems by Akua Lezli Hope, Alex M. Jeffers, and Steve Rasnic Tem

Cover art for "How the Wind Spoke at Madaket" by Joe Burleson

Joel Davis: President & Publisher Isaac Asimov: Editorial Director
William F. Battista: Associate Publisher Shawna McCarthy: Editor
Terri Czeczko: Art Editor Sheila Williams: Associate Editor

Published 13 times a year by Davis Publications, Inc. at $2.00 per copy. Annual subscription of thirteen issues $19.50 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $24.20, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305. Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1985 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send form 3579 to IAsfm, Box 1933, Marion OH 43306. In Canada return to 625 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN 0162-2188.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL
DIALOG

by Isaac Asimov

Most stories deal with people and one of the sure-fire activities of people is that of talking and of making conversation. It follows that in most stories there is dialog. Sometimes stories are largely dialog; my own stories almost always are. For that reason, when I think of the art of writing (which isn't often, I must admit) I tend to think of dialog.

In the romantic period of literature in the first part of the nineteenth century, the style of dialog tended to be elaborate and adorned. Authors used their full vocabulary and had their characters speak ornately.

I remember when I was very young and first read Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. How I loved the conversation. The funny passages were very funny to me, though I had trouble with John Browdie's thick Yorkshire accent (something his beloved Matilda, brought up under similar conditions, lacked, for some reason). What I loved even more though was the ornamentation—the way everyone "spoke like a book."

Thus, consider the scene in which Nicholas Nickleby confronts his villainous Uncle Ralph. Nicholas's virtuous and beautiful sister, Kate, who has been listening to Ralph's false version of events, which make out Nicholas to have been doing wrong, cried out wildly to her brother, "Refute these calumnies . . ."

Of course, I had to look up "refute" and "calumny" in the dictionary, but that meant I had learned two useful words. I also had never heard any 17-year-old girl of my acquaintance use those words but that just showed me how superior the characters in the book were, and that filled me with satisfaction.

It's easy to laugh at the books of that era and to point out that no one *really* talks that way. But then, do you suppose people in Shakespeare's time went around casually speaking in iambic pentameter?

Still, don't you want literature to improve on nature? Sure you do. When you go to the movies, the hero and heroine don't look like the people you see in the streets, do they? Of course not. They look like movie stars. The characters in fiction are better looking, stronger, braver, more ingenious and clever,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than anyone you are likely to meet, so why shouldn't they speak better, too?

And yet there are values in realism—in making people look, and sound, and act like real people.

For instance, back in 1919, some of the players on the pennant-winning Chicago White Sox were accused of accepting money from gamblers to throw the World Series (the so-called "Black Sox" scandal) and were barred from baseball for life as a result. At the trial, a young lad is supposed to have followed his idol, the greatest of the accused, "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, and to have cried out in anguish, "Say it ain't so, Joe."

That is a deathless cry that can't be tampered with. It is unthinkable to have the boy say "Refute these calumnies, Joseph," even though that's what he means. Any writer who tried to improve matters in that fashion would, and should, be lynched at once. I doubt that anyone would, or should, even change it to "Say it isn't so, Joe."

For that matter, you couldn't possibly have had Kate Nickleby cry out to her brother, "Say it ain't so, Nick."

Of course, during much of history most people were illiterate and the reading of books was very much confined to the few who were educated and scholarly. Such books of fiction as existed were supposed to "improve the mind," or risk being regarded as works of the devil.

It was only gradually, as mass education began to flourish, that books began to deal with ordinary people. Of course, Shakespeare had his clowns and Dickens had his Sam Wellers, and in both cases, dialog was used that mangled the English language to some extent—but that was intended as humor. The audience was expected to laugh uproariously at these representatives of the lower classes.

As far as I know the first great book which was written entirely and seriously in substandard English and which was a great work of literature nevertheless (or even, possibly, to some extent *because* of it) was Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, which was published in 1884. Huck Finn is himself the narrator, and he is made to speak as an uneducated backwoods boy *would* speak—if he happened to be a literary genius. That is, he used the dialect of an uneducated boy, but he put together sentences and paragraphs like a master.

The book was extremely popular when it came out because its realism made it incredibly effective—but it was also extremely controversial as all sorts of fatheads inveighed against it because it didn't use proper English.

And yet, at that, Mark Twain had to draw the line, too, as did all writers until the present generation.

People, all sorts of people, use vulgarisms as a matter of course. I remember my days in the army when it was impossible to hear a single sentence in which the com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mon word for sexual intercourse was not used as an all-purpose adjective. Later, after I had gotten out of the army, I lived on a street along which young boys and girls walked to the local junior high school in the morning, and back again in the evening, and their shouted conversations brought back memories of my barracks days with nauseating clarity.

Yet could writers reproduce that aspect of common speech? Of course not. For that reason, Huck Finn was always saying that something was "blamed" annoying, "blamed" this, "blamed" that. You can bet that the *least* he was really saying was "damned."

A whole set of euphemisms was developed and placed in the mouths of characters who wouldn't, in real life, have been caught dead saying them. Think of the all the "dad-blameds," and "gol-darneds," and "consarneds" we have seen in print and heard in the movies. To be sure, youngsters say them as a matter of caution for they would probably be punished (if of "good family") by their parents if caught using the terms they had heard said parents use. (Don't let your hearts bleed for the kids for when they grow up they will beat up *their* kids for the same crime.)

For the last few decades, however, it has become permissible to use all the vulgarisms freely and many writers have availed themselves of the new freedom to lend an air of further realism to their dialog. What's more, they are apt

ISAAC ASIMOV:
Editorial Director
SHAWNA McCARTHY:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Associate Editor
AMY STOUT:
Editorial Assistant
RALPH RUBINO:
Corporate Art Director
GERRY HAWKINS:
Associate Art Director
TERRI CZECZKO:
Art Editor
MARIANNE WELDON:
Associate Designer
CARL BARTEE:
Director of Manufacturing
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Manager
LAUREN C. COUNCIL:
Production Assistant
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Subsidiary Rights Manager
BARBARA BAZYN:
Permissions & Contracts Manager
MICHAEL DILLON:
Circulation Director Retail Marketing
PRISCILLA GARSTON:
Circulation Manager Subscriptions
WILLIAM F. BATTISTA:
Advertising Director
JAMIE FILLON:
Advertising Manager
IRENE BOZOKI:
Classified Advertising Manager

ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 557-9100

JOEL DAVIS
President and Publisher

LEONARD F. PINTO
Vice President
&
General Manager

PAULA COLLINS
Vice President
Circulation

FRED EDINGER
Vice President
Finance

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

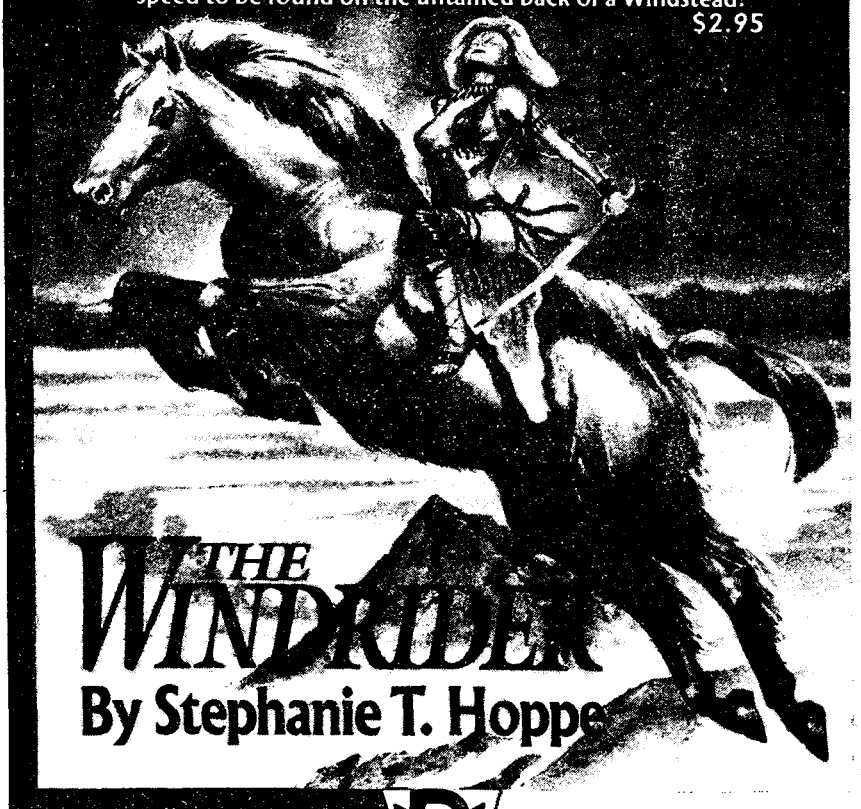
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Away from Empire, freedom rides the savage plateau

Once the prime contender for the throne of Dynast, Oa has fled the Empire and its terrible ultimatum: kill her true love in the deadly High Dance, or forsake her claim.

Wandering into unknown lands, she comes to a strange, high plateau—where those with power ride remarkable beasts whose flight is like the primeval rush of the wind. And no battle is too great to fight, Oa learns, for the freedom and speed to be found on the untamed back of a Windstead!

$2.95



THE WINDRIDER

By Stephanie T. Hoppe

The Exclusive Science Fiction and Fantasy Line Selected by DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

DAW FANTASY

Distributed by NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to resent bitterly any suggestion that this habit be modified or that some non-vulgar expression be substituted.

In fact, one sees a curious reversal now. A writer must withstand a certain criticism, if he does *not* make use of said vulgarisms.

Once when I read a series of letters by science fiction writers in which such terms were used freely and frequently, I wrote a response that made what seemed to me to be an obvious point. In it, I said something like this:

"Ordinary people, who are not well-educated and who lack a large working vocabulary, are limited in their ability to lend force to their statements. In their search for force, they must therefore make use of vulgarisms which serve, through their shock-value, but which, through overuse, quickly lose whatever force they have, so that the purpose of the use is defeated.

"Writers, on the other hand, have (it is to be presumed) the full and magnificent vocabulary of the English language at their disposal. They can say anything they want with whatever intensity of invective they require in a thousand different ways without ever once deviating from full respectability of utterance. They have, therefore, no need to trespass upon the usages of the ignorant and forlorn, and to steal their tattered expressions as substitutes for the language of Shakespeare and Milton."

All I got for my pains was a few comments to the effect that there must be something seriously wrong with me.

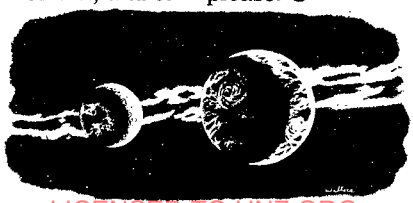
Nevertheless, it is my contention that dialog is realistic when, and only when, it reflects the situation as you describe it and when it produces the effect you wish to produce.

At rather rare intervals, I will make use of dialect. I will have someone speak as a Brooklyn-bred person would (that is, as I myself do, in my hours of ease), or insert Yiddishisms here and there, if it serves a purpose. I may even try to make up a dialect, as I did in *Foundation's Edge*, if it plays an important part in the development of the story.

Mostly, however, I do not.

The characters in my stories (almost without exception) are pictured as being well-educated and highly intelligent. It is natural, therefore, for them to make use of a wide vocabulary and to speak precisely and grammatically, even though I try not to fall into the ornateness of the Romantic Ear.

And, as a matter of quixotic principle, I try to avoid expletives, even mild ones, when I can.—But other writers, of course, may do as they please. ●



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Gentlemen:

The *Viewpoint* in the August issue brings up some very interesting topics. However, I think that there are some basic flaws in the so-called Paradox, most of them focusing on alien culture.

Mr. Gillett is quite disdainful of science-fiction tales in which hordes of intelligent aliens are discovered; that is, disdainful of ill-thought-out and trite science-fiction. However, he himself makes a very trite mistake: he assumes that all intelligent aliens will *want* to become spacefarers. Why should they? Considering the disparity of modes of thought even within the bounds of our own small biosphere, why is it illogical to assume that many alien cultures simply do not consider expansion a reasonable course?

Mr. Gillett assumes that all races will think like us, and nothing, I'm sure, will be further from the truth. We here on Earth, some say, cannot even recognize other intelligences—that is, other primates, dolphins, whales, etc. Intelligence does not necessarily indicate technology.

Take another consideration. Perhaps intelligent, technological races *have* developed, but in distant corners of our galaxy (or in other galaxies). The amount of time necessary to travel here, even at Daedalus-like speeds (see the report by the British Interplanetary Society) might well be ridiculous, i.e. thousands of lifetimes. And anyway, why would any intelligent race living millions of light-years away select *this* planet out of *billions* of others? Granted, they may have a lot of time, but suppose that all, say, five intelligent technological races are at our level (or lower!). Give them time, Mr. Gillett, give them time!

Finally, Mr. Gillett mentions the destruction of races. His comfortable little statement that "things are not necessarily that bleak" is amusing.

Considering all the effects of an all-out nuclear war (nuclear winter, ionizing radiation, radioactive soil deposits, etc.), we can safely postulate that within a few thousand years (perhaps many fewer) there will be *no* life on Earth whatsoever, apart from lichens and cockroaches. And past evidence doesn't show that they're evolving anywhere, does it?

In short, it is quite possible that alien cultures may destroy themselves (actually, *obliterate* might be a better word) and *never* arise from the ashes—not even in seventy-million years.

When we consider such poten-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tially Earth-shaking topics as alien intelligence, we must not close the open mind.

Sincerely,

Rudolph von Abele, Jr.
Washington, DC

In the early 1400's, China was farther advanced in all phases of ship-building and navigation than Europe was. Chinese ships criss-crossed the Indian Ocean and entered the Red Sea. And then China decided, voluntarily, that it was unworthwhile to deal with the barbarians and chose to remain within its own borders, and so it fell to Portugal to establish the first overseas Empire, and Europe had five centuries of world domination. So you may be right. Perhaps not all intelligences will be interested in exploring the Universe.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Some years ago I was given a subscription to *IAsfm*. I let the subscription lapse, because—while the stories were well done—most were a bit juvenile for my taste. Then, just last week, my husband picked up the July issue of *IAsfm* to help me pass the time; I had been stricken by a summer cold. I turned first to the cover story, "A Traveler's Tale," by Lucius Shepard. I had never heard of this author and my expectations were not high. I was amazed to find that the story was beautifully written, the characters well-established, the setting marvelously described. Terrific story! As soon as I was well, I hurried to a friend's house and looked through her back issues of the magazine for more stories by Shepard. There were none, but I found other wonderful stories by Bear, Dozois, and others. I am currently in the process of moving, but as soon as the move is complete, you may expect my check in the mail for a subscription.

The reason I'm writing is that this weekend as I was browsing through the local newsstand I ran across a letter in *Amazing*, which stated that the writer had stopped subscribing to *IAsfm* because it was too juvenile. The editor's response to the letter did not inform the letter-writer that *IAsfm* was now anything but a juvenile magazine; he simply stated that science fiction has long depended on the juvenile market to sustain itself and will continue so to depend. I won't argue that. I grew up on juvenile fiction by Heinlein and others; but I don't find reading those works rewarding any longer, and I'm delighted to learn there is a magazine which—unlike *Amazing*—offers something for the adult reader. It strikes me that you may have a public relations problem, that there are other readers like myself who aren't aware of the new direction the magazine has taken under your stewardship. I have no suggestions to offer, but I thought I would bring the problem to your attention.

Keep up the good work.

And please! More stories by Lucius Shepard.

Selena Morrill
Ormond Beach, FL

I wouldn't say "juvenile." I would say "lighthearted." Yes, under George Scithers (who is now with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"NEVER-STOP ACTION AND MIND-BENDING CONCEPTS
COMBINE TO MAKE ORION ABSOLUTELY UNFORGETTABLE....BEN BOVA
BRINGS IT TO INTENSE LIFE ON
A CANVAS SPREAD OVER TIME AND SPACE."
—ISAAC ASIMOV

"A GRIPPING STORY OF AN IMMORTAL'S HATRED,
A MORTAL'S LOVE, AND A DEATH-STRUGGLE
THAT SPANS A MILLION YEARS."
—SPIDER ROBINSON

ORION

A SWEEPING NEW
SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL BY

BEN BOVA

0-812-53215-5 432 PAGES $3.50 ON SALE IN MARCH

TOR BOOKS WE'RE PART OF THE FUTURE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Amazing), *the magazine was lighthearted, loaded with puns and other bits of good-humor. The beauteous Shawna and her able assistant, sweet Sheila, are more serious individuals and that is bound to be reflected in the magazine. However, I remain unreconstructed and my editorial, letter-answers, and George and Azazel stories, remain lighthearted (but* never *juvenile).*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Martin Gardner,

In the November 1984 *IAsfm,* you lay to rest the fallacy about the Great Wall of China being visible from the Moon. (Though the way I heard it, it was that the Great Wall was visible from space, presumably low Earth orbit. Is that true? If so, it would explain the error in the New York *Times.* To the *Times,* the Moon and Earth orbit are exactly the same; they are both "space." Just as nuclear power and nuclear weapons are exactly the same to the Times; they are both "nukes." It's amazing how simple things become when you simplify the language.)

But you perpetuate another fallacy: that H.G. Wells did not recognize that the retina must be visible for the Invisible Man to see. It is true that when the Invisible Man is first unwrapped, in chapter seven, we are told that there is "nothingness, no visible thing at all!" But this description is given from the viewpoint of a group of excitable villagers. In chapter twenty we get a more careful description, and there we read: "I stared at nothing in my shaving-glass, at nothing save where an attenuated pigment still remained behind the retina of my eyes, fainter than mist."

This is not to say that an Invisible Man is possible, but just that in chapter twenty, H.G. Wells makes it seem wonderfully possible, including giving the almost invisible Man a little something visible to see with.

Best,

Rick Norwood
Wayne, NJ

Martin Gardner comments:

The New York Times *(March 8, 1983) reported in its Topics column that the Great Wall is "the only mortal creation visible from the Moon." On March 20 the* Times *published a letter from a reader who said this was as absurd as seeing a popsicle stick from 384 kilometers. In the Topics column of the same issue, the* Times *apologized for its error. Mr. Norwood is dead right about Wells's almost invisible man.*

Dear Doctor Asimov:

I am writing to you concerning the June issue of your magazine. Frankly, you goofed (I think).

In James Killus' "Sun Smoke," one of the characters mentions selling a story called, "Moment of Inertia" to *High Tech, the Magazine of Future Fiction.* If titles are copywrited, along with the stories they belong to, someone should be suing Mr. Killus for plagiarism. "Moment of Inertia" is also the title of a story written by Charles Sheffield and published in the October 1980 issue of *Analog.* Perhaps Mr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Killus based the inane plot the character gives on Mr. Sheffield's story, because both contain four characters. However, there should be no excuse. I would like to say this to Mr. Killus: "Make up your own freaking title!!!"

Dr. Asimov, I would like to apologize for taking up your time. I am a fifteen-year-old Science Fiction addict. I have been reading your books since the age of nine or so, but I must admit that I didn't really comprehend them until a few years ago. I particularly enjoyed "Thiotimoline to the Stars."

Unlike most, I have no complaints about your magazine, other than Mr. Killus' mistake. I do have a request, though. Should there be any drastic changes made in the format of *IAsfm,* please leave both "Mooney's Module" and your editorials. I like them most of all. Thank you for your time.

John Kristof
Route 5, Box 291
Caldwell, TX 77836

Fifteen is not too soon to learn something important. Titles are not copyrighted. Enough stories have now been written so that very many titles duplicate earlier ones. I once wrote a book called The Human Body *and there must be at least a dozen earlier books with that same title. So what?*

—Isaac Asimov

To the Editors of
Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine:

I have been promising myself for quite some time that I would write to all of you and offer my thanks for giving me at least *one* publication (approximately) each month that is guaranteed to stimulate my mind and, if not give me joy each time, make me think seriously about something more than my own problems. But with the August, 1984, issue I *had* to write —surely, "Realtime" by Daniel Keys Moran and Gladys Prebehalla is one of the most incredible stories I have ever had the distinct pleasure to read. I admit it, that was me crying on the Long Island Rail Road at 7:40 A.M. Please, oh please!, promise me that you will publish more of their work, collectively or individually! I can only say, with a modicum of jealousy, that I sincerely wish I had written that story. Not to steal their thunder, but to be able to lay claim to such a wonderful piece of work.

Many times I am not as moved as I might be by the selections in your magazine because I belong to that select group of readers who like their science fiction tempered with a little fantasy. I suppose it's because I like to soften the rough edges of things; must be something Freudian in there. I realize that there is a definite place for the "new wave," harsher variety of sci fi that appears in your pages and I freely admit that many of these stories have provided me with a sobering viewpoint on an issue, or a genuine chill down my spine, but for pure pleasure, give me "Realtime" and stories like it. You will probably be getting flack for publishing a story so "fantastic" from your harder core readers, but I must thank you for giving us all the present (beautifully wrapped in Hisaki Yasuda's cover painting)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of reading (and re-reading!) this marvelous story.

I would also like to use this opportunity to say that I would enjoy corresponding with other dedicated readers of science fiction. Unfortunately, my husband does not share my passion for sci fi (he *does* have other good qualities) and I miss the dialogue I used to have in college about the latest books, short stories, and favorite classics.

Very truly yours,

Erika J. Muller
116 Lindell Boulevard
Long Beach, NY 11561

We try to suit varying tastes, and it is a pleasure to please yours some of the time, at any rate. I must admit, though, I do not see how a husband who is not a dedicated science fiction reader can possibly have any good qualities at all. Speak to him severely about this and make him buy his own copy as punishment.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Asimov:

In your June, 1984, issue of *IAsfm,* you had an article called "Clarifying Clarion," which was arguing whether or not Science Fiction could or could not be taught. The viewpoint was to argue if it can be taught, not to advertise the school "Clarion."

In my eyes a science fiction writer cannot be taught how to write. Yes, they can be taught the basics, such as, how to put the paragraphs in the right order and the correct use of punctuation, but no writer can be taught imagination or skill. For example, were you, Asimov, ever taught this? Yes, John W. Campbell did give you suggestions and supported you all the way, but he did not teach you how to write.

In the article Algis Budrys gave the address and told how the teaching was done, but he did not answer the one question that all us science fiction fans have: Can you teach science fiction? I say no.

If there are any comments from anyone who has read the June, 1984, issue and disagrees or agrees with me, I welcome any arguments whatsoever.

Yours truly,

Eylat Eleasari
2240 16th St.
Santa Monica, CA 90405

Of course, one can't teach a person to write good science fiction if he lacks all writing talent. However, if he possesses writing talent to begin with, good instruction might hasten his improvement in technique, so that he will write far fewer unacceptable stories before turning out masterpieces. Surely, you would consider that a worthwhile result of submitting to instruction.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov
and Ms. McCarthy,

I don't like having to write this letter; I'd much rather be writing to tell you how much I enjoyed reading the August *IAsfm.* However, if that issue is what I can expect in the future from you, then I will have to write another letter canceling my subscription. I know that not every issue will be a blockbuster, that some mediocre and even poor work will get published. But that issue contained *four* gar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

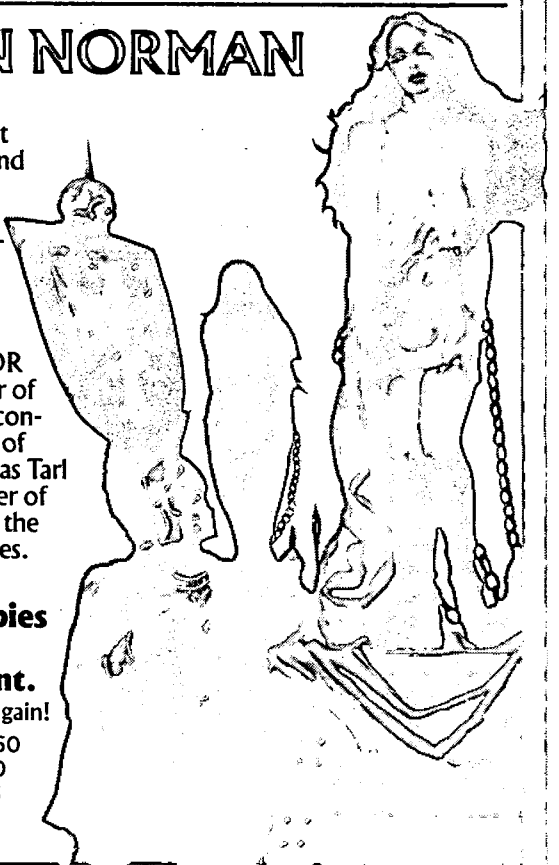
THE 21ST BOOK OF THE TARL CABOT SAGA

Mercenaries of GOR

By JOHN NORMAN

The armies of Cos have begun their sweep against the mighty city of Ar—and Tarl Cabot is swept up in their drive. Outcast from Port Kar and rejected by the Priest Kings, Cabot must now fight for his own redemption.

MERCENARIES OF GOR brings into a blinding blur of action all the magic and conflict of a barbarian world of warriors and slave girls—as Tarl Cabot becomes the center of intrigue and treachery in the city of his greatest enemies. $3.95



Over 6 million copies of John Norman's GOR novels in print.

Just re-issued & available again!

MARAUDERS OF GOR $3.50
TRIBESMEN OF GOR $3.50
SLAVE GIRL OF GOR $3.95
BEASTS OF GOR $3.95

The Exclusive Science Fiction and Fantasy Line Selected by DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

DAW SCIENCE FICTION

Distributed by NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bage stories! Neither "Blue Crick Holler Folks," nor "Realtime," nor "Resurrection," nor "From the Labyrinth of Night" should ever have been printed. All of them are feeble reworkings of themes which ceased to be original or even plausible decades ago.

"Blue Crick Holler Folks" is perhaps the worst, since it repeats an obvious scientific error (fertility between species). Dr. Asimov has often decried the scientific ignorance of the public and the flagrant errors perpetrated by ignorant authors. I would have thought that he would keep such stuff from being published under his name.

"From the Labyrinth of Night" is the most hackneyed: the idea of a robot in the form of a woman developing human emotion was an interesting idea in 1938 when Lester del Rey wrote "Helen O'Loy," but that was forty-six years ago!

The central idea of "Resurrection" (world-ruling computer becomes godlike and creates stultifying paradise) is at least twenty-five years old. All that Damien Broderick has added to this story is a few new technical terms, egregiously misused. (For example, "core memory" is obsolete, used only in a few old systems.) Mr. Broderick should either learn what the technical language means or resort to such time-honored ambiguities as "memory bank."

"Realtime" combines the flaws of the other two: it borrows from the ancient past ("Helen O'Loy" *again:* artificial intelligence deranged by exposure to romantic fiction) and repeats some of the same technical errors. The authors are literary slovens as well: they misspelled "D'Artagnan" throughout the story.

All three stories seem to suffer from the same disease. Computers are much in the news today, so authors write stories about computers. Unfortunately, they don't know anything about real computers, so they write about absurd imaginary computers with awareness and emotions absurdly grafted onto them, and sprinkle technical terms about.

What makes this all extremely sad is that there were some good stories in this issue. A magazine is like a hero sandwich, with many ingredients. The meat can be prime beef, but if the mustard is horse puckey, I'm not going to buy. You have got to tighten up your standards. John W. Campbell was far from perfect, but he wouldn't buy a story that confused klystron tubes with rectifiers or had the hero rescuing Martian princesses in sword fights.

Sincerely yours,

Rich Rostrom
Chicago, IL

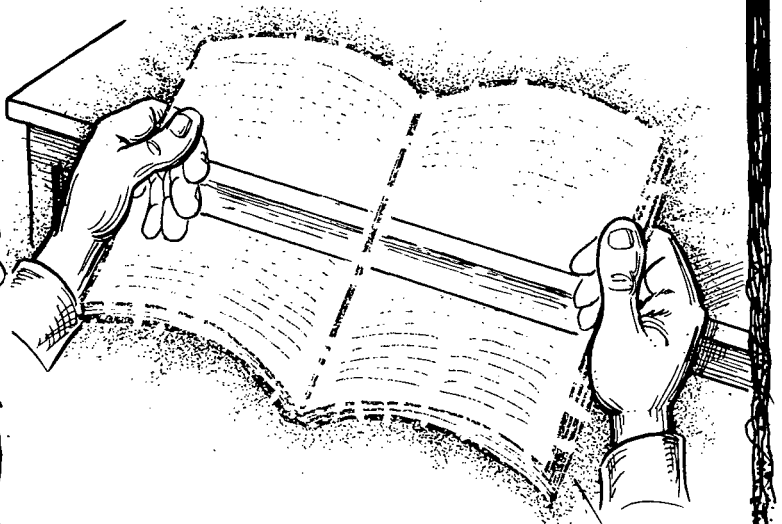
Ideas are bound to be repetitive; original ideas are all but non-existent. What an editor buys is the treatment of an idea and the quality of the writing that enshrines it.

—Isaac Asimov

MOVING? If you want your subscription to *IAsfm* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 1933, Marion OH 43306.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IS THIS MAGAZINE FOR REAL?



Is the Earth triangular? Are cats frogs? Maybe these and perhaps many other somewhat provocative questions might be probed on tonight's more-or-less controversial:

"WHO KNOWS?"

Sponsored by I.D.E.S.
(The Institute for Doubting the Evidence of our Senses)

SOMETIME TONIGHT ON TV

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

A new series of $6.00 SF *Micro Adventure Games* has been introduced by FASA Corporation, the company that published *Star Trek: The Role-Playing Game* (all these games can be found at your local game or hobby store, or direct from P.O. Box 6930, Chicago, IL 60680).

There are six different *Micros* available, and each one is packaged in a small 4-by-7-inch box. Four of the games are in the *Star Trek* line; the other two are in FASA's new series based on *The Last Starfighter* movie.

While all six games are fun, the most innovative—and really different designs—are the three *Starship Duel* games: *The Last Starfighter: Duel in Space; Starship Duel I: Enterprise vs. Bird of Prey;* and *Starship Duel II: U.S.S. Reliant vs. Klingon L-9.*

What's different about these *Micros* is there's no board, book, or playing surface used to play the games. Instead, each *Starship Duel* uses two unique "Navigation Wheels" to determine movement and positions for combat.

Each player has a Wheel which shows his starship in the center. Surrounding the center ship are eight view-ports, representing the eight possible areas the enemy ship can appear in after both players make their maneuvers. There are, however, more than eight positions: within each of these eight view-ports or areas, the enemy ship can be in any one of eight different headings (that is, pointing in one of eight different directions). This means there are 64 possible results from movement—the two dueling ships can end up head-to-head, head-to-tail, side-to-side, tail-to-tail, or in one of many variations on these positions.

In addition to the Navigation Wheels (which take a little assembly before they can be used), each *Starship Duel* game includes a Statistic Card for each ship, a number of die-cut markers to use on the Statistic Cards, two six-sided dice, and a 4-by-5½-inch, 32-page illustrated rulesbook.

Each Statistic Card shows a ship's vital information: total power available to assign to shields and weapons; current shields' strength; weapon power and chances to hit the enemy in each of the eight areas around the ship; and superstructure damage track. The die-cut markers are color-coded and say either "damage," "power," or "superstructure." These markers are placed directly on the Statistics Card in the appropriate locations to show your ship's fighting condition at each point in the game.

To start the game, each player rolls one die and the one with the highest roll chooses his ship first. This does make some difference, since the starships are not equal in weapons, shields, or power.

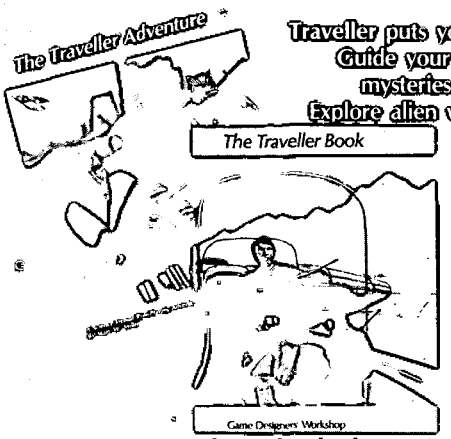
For example, the *Enterprise* can throw a lot of power into its phasers and photon torpedoes fired from the front of the ship, but has no weapons firing to the direct rear. The *L-42*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Put yourself in the story!

TRAVELLER®

Science-Fiction Adventure in the Far Future



Traveller puts you in the middle of the action! Guide your favorite character through the mysteries and dangers of the far future. Explore alien worlds, puzzle out the enigmas of ancient civilizations, conduct complicated confidence scams, smuggle, build empires, lead revolutions, wage interstellar war . . . the list of science fiction role-playing adventures is as unlimited as your own imagination.

The Traveller Book

Complete rules, background, advice for players and referees, scenarios, and two short adventures.

The Traveller Adventure

A series of interwoven scenarios and adventures among the worlds of the Spinward Marches.

There are more than forty books, boxed sets, modules, supplements, adventures, and games for Traveller, with new material appearing regularly. Traveller is available from better book, game, and hobby retailers around the world.

Game Designers' Workshop

P.O. Box 1646, Bloomington, Illinois 61701

Free catalog on request.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bird of Prey can't put as much power into its disruptors and torpedoes to the front as can the *Enterprise*, but the *L-42* can fire with modest power to its direct rear. This means the *Enterprise* has a "blind" spot that makes it very vulnerable if you allow the *Bird of Prey* to get directly behind it, while the *L-42* can still defend itself from every position.

After choosing ships, each player places "power" markers on the shields sections of his Statistic Card, based on the total number of power points available. You then place "power" markers in the torpedo and phaser/disruptor boxes on the Card to indicate how many weapons you have powered and are ready to fire.

Starting positions for the two ships are determined by rolling dice. After each player has his opponent's ship in one of the eight view-ports on the Navigation Wheel, power points are assigned, and your ship's heading (movement direction) is chosen without telling your opponent. Headings are revealed simultaneously; then new positions determined by turning the Navigation Wheels.

Each wheel has three parts. The top part shows your ship in the center with the eight view-ports around it. The middle part has only one open view-port and the rest are blocked (only black space shows through your view-ports). The bottom part shows the enemy ship in one of eight different positions. By turning the top and bottom parts of the wheel, based on your heading and your opponent's heading, you can see the new positions the ships have assumed relative to each other after maneuvering.

For example, if you move two "clicks" (windows) to the right (clockwise), that's a 45 degree turn. After turning your top wheel part two clicks, you then adjust your view of the enemy ship by taking your opponent's heading and turning the bottom part of your Navigation Wheel in that direction. If he didn't change heading—that is, he continued in the same direction—you don't change the bottom part of the Wheel.

After this adjustment, you then look at the numbers next to the view-port where you see the enemy ship. Since both ships are assumed to have been moving forward when they changed headings, the Wheels need to be turned to the view-port and position you now see the enemy ship in, based on these two numbers.

Although it sounds complicated, it's really easy to use after you try it a few times. As soon as the new positions of the ships have been determined, you can then fire with any weapons powered and available in that part of your ship.

Hits are scored by rolling dice, with each weapon able to hit, modified by the direction in which you're firing. Hits are first scored against shields, with "power" markers reduced for each hit. If the hit gets through a shield, either a "power" marker is removed or the superstructure takes damage. It's also possible for special damage to happen on lucky hit rolls, such as preventing the enemy ship from firing on its next turn because you temporarily damaged its targeting computer.

There are three movement/firing phases per turn, after which you reallocate remaining "power" markers to shields and weapons. This continues until one or both ships are destroyed, or you've successfully disengaged.

These *Starship Duel Micro Adventure Games* are fast, fun, innovative designs. They're a great way to introduce a beginner to SF games, and they're very challenging for experienced players. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You need...

Zonked by Zork?

Ensorcelled by Enchanter?

THE GUIDEBOOK FOR WINNING ADVENTURERS

DAVID AND SANDY SMALL

The *one* cluebook you need to avoid buying all those expensive individual guides to today's most popular computer adventure games! In it you'll find maps · tips · treasure lists · and all the clues you need – *in code, so you can decipher only the answers you choose to see* – to conquer the tough spots of the top adventure games. Plus – tips to get you started on writing your own!

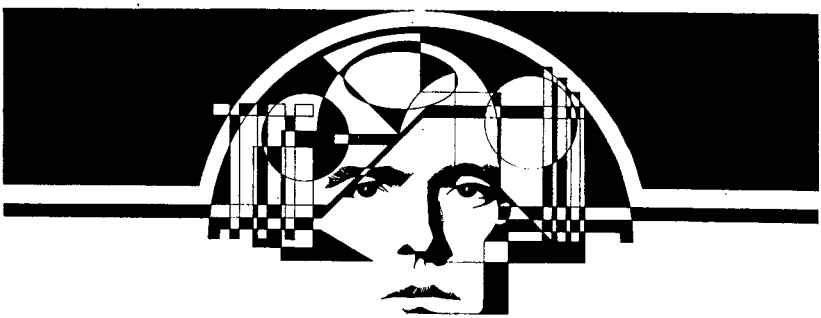
APRIL · 55955-9 · 256 pp. · $8.95

Distributed by
Simon & Schuster
Mass Merchandise Sales Company
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10020

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARTIN GARDNER

BAR BETS ON THE BAGEL



Ensign Pulver, Lieutenant Flarp, and Colonel Couth were relaxing in the bar of the spaceship *Bagel*. Pulver, who had a passion for curious tricks and puzzles, especially puzzles with a catch answer, picked up a folder of matches.

"You may not believe it," he said, pointing to a glass of water on the table, "but I can light a match and cause it to burn under the water in that glass."

Flarp groaned. "Okay, Pulver. I don't believe it. Let's see you do it."

Flarp struck a match. Then he picked up the glass of water and held the burning match below it.

Flarp groaned again, but louder.

Pulver tore another match out of the folder. "Here's another good one. I'll bet you can't drop this match on the table, from a height of a meter, and make it land so it stands on an edge."

"I know that one," said Couth. He picked up the match, bent it into the shape of a V, and dropped it.

Pulver seemed not in the least dismayed. From his pocket he took a small coin, about the size of what was called a dime in the United States back in the twentieth century. "How about this? Drop the coin from a height of six centimeters so it lands on the table and stays upright on its edge."

Flarp and Couth thought about this while they sipped their crimson-colored Martian martinis. When they gave up, Pulver dipped the coin in the glass of water, pressed it against the outside of the glass near the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rim, then let go. The water made the coin adhere to the straight side of the glass. The coin slid to the table and remained on its edge, still clinging to the glass.

This time both Flarp and Couth groaned.

"Now it's my turn to show *you* one," said Couth to Pulver. He arranged four matches on the table to form a martini glass. Then he picked the cholive out of his cocktail and placed it inside the glass as shown in Figure 1. Cholives are tiny brown berries obtained by crossing olive and

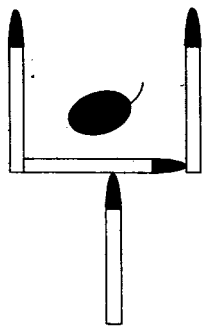


Figure 1

cherry trees. The hybrid trees were first cultivated on Mars where their fruit quickly became a popular ingredient of most Martian cocktails.

"What's the problem?" asked Pulver.

"Very simple," Couth replied. "You are to pick up just two matches, then replace them so as to reform the martini glass, but with the cholive *outside* the glass. The reformed glass must be like the one you started with except it needn't have the same orientation."

"I assume I'm not allowed to touch the cholive."

"You assume right," said Couth. "Otherwise you could simply move the cholive outside without moving *any* matches."

Let me restate the problem to make it clear. Move just two matches to make a martini glass, of the same size and shape as the original, but with the cholive on the outside. The reformed glass may be in any of the four orientations shown in Figure 2.

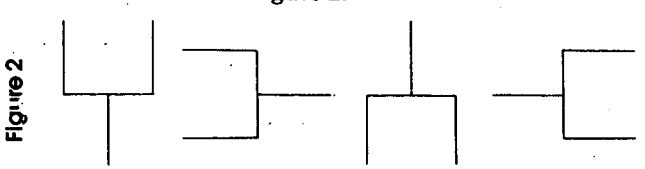
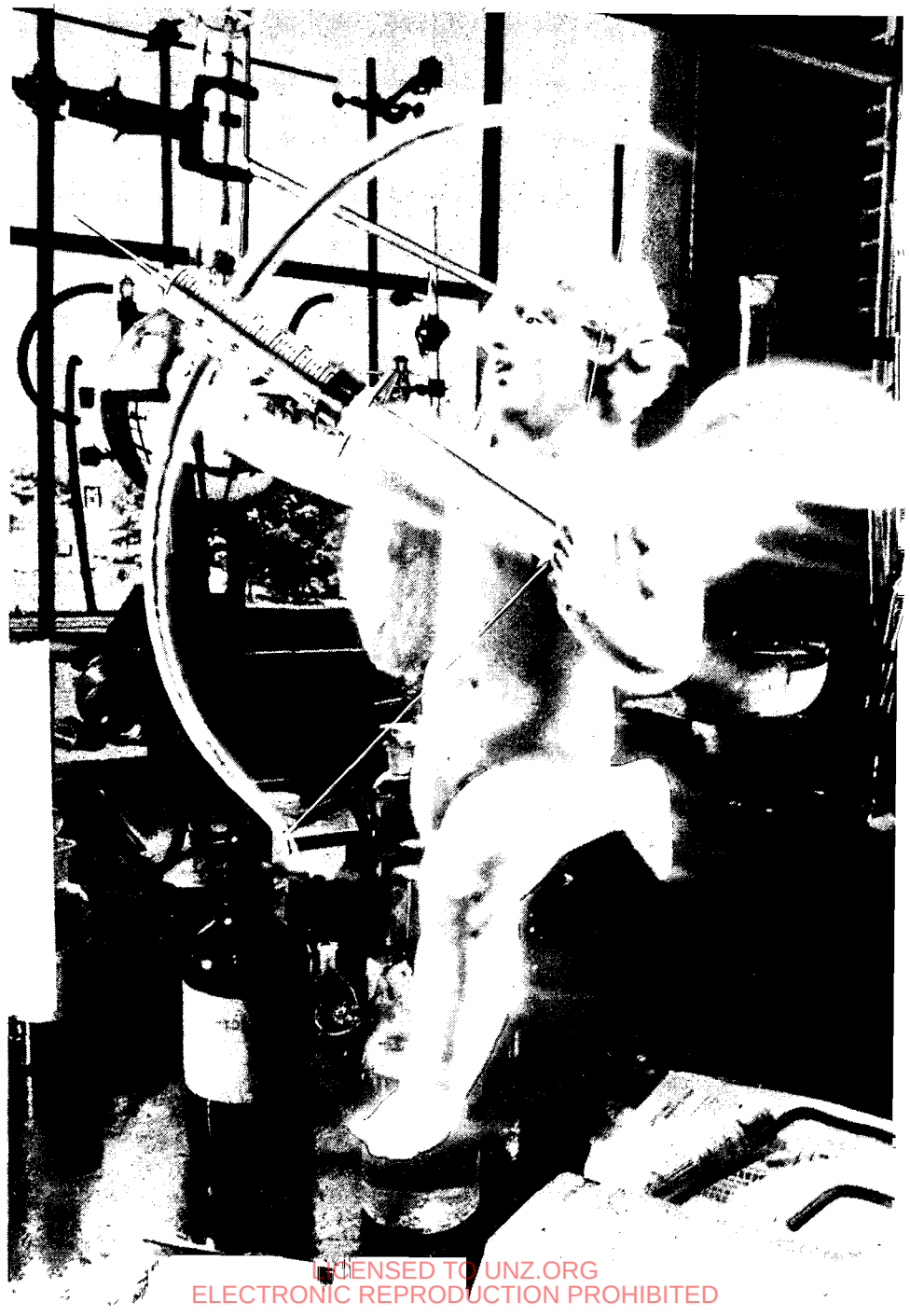


Figure 2

It's a great puzzle to show friends. You'll be surprised how difficult it is, though if you have the right insight you may solve it quickly. Try not to look at the answer on page 112 until you've given it some strenuous thought.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

LOVE-POTIONS

art: J.K. Potter

by Tom Rainbow

Here is another fine Viewpoint by the late Dr. Tom Rainbow. At the request of Tom's wife, Marsha Kness, and because we'd like to share as much of Tom's work with you as we can, we've included an excerpt from the amusing blurb which Tom originally wished us to run with this article.

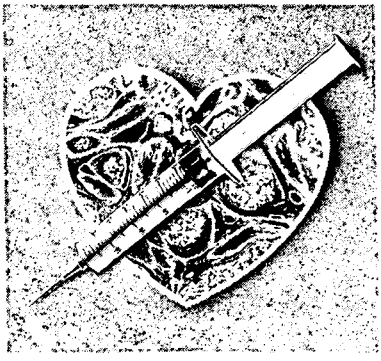
Tom Rainbow (Ph.D) is assistant professor of Pharmacology at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. This is his sixth article for Viewpoint, but who's counting? His natural attractiveness is such that he has no need of Love Potions. In fact, he often has to not bathe for several days to ward off the hordes of undergraduate women. You, too, can be a Love-God, just like him, if you buy *Asimov's Guide to Teenage Dating*, Dr. Rainbow's next project.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

Have you ever gazed longingly into the eyes of someone, male or female, hominid or ruminant, and realized that you had absolutely no chance at all with this person? That, romantically speaking, you may as well have been part of the 4° Kelvin cosmic background radiation—sort of a low hiss that pervades the entire Universe, and is often mistaken for pigeon-droppings on the antenna of one's radio-telescope? If you're male, did you ever ask *all* of the girls in your 10th-grade Honors Physics class if they wanted to go to the junior prom, only to be greeted with howls of laughter, unfeminine epithets, and phone calls from their boyfriends threatening to make you into a low-grade handsoap, if you so much as *thought* about doing that again?

Well, uh, I have. Actually, I think it was my Honors Social Studies class, but the outcome was the same—yet another Friday night watching the *Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, wondering how Napolean Solo cleared up his zits. From careful demographic studies that we do here at *IAsfm*, I know



"Although esteemed by poets, lyricists and copy-writers of contraceptive ads, love is nothing more than a brain-process, a bunch of molecules and cells, vaguely akin to digestion or micturition. You wouldn't want to write a sonnet about micturition, would you? Not unless you're much weirder than our marketing research indicates."

TOM RAINBOW

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that a lot of you are or were a lot like me—pimple-ridden jerk-faces with all the social graces of a decerebrate llama, unable to get within 50 meters downwind of the opposite sex without someone calling the E.P.A. Our market research has shown that if you were at all popular in high school, you'd now be reading *Town and Country,* instead of *IAsfm,* so don't kid yourself.

Given that my chances of writing for *Town and Country* are about like my chances of getting a date in 10th grade, which is to say, zero, I have a financial interest in maintaining, if not expanding, the population of science-fiction readers. What can be done to assure that such a singularly unattractive group will continue to breed? Artifical insemination? Like with the pandas? *Yuck!* Maybe if I could borrow a spacesuit from NASA and keep my eyes closed. . . . Mandatory de-lousings at all Worldcons? No, the optimum solution would be to create a *love-potion,* a tried and true science-fiction/fantasy concept. I have in mind something so potent even the most *popular* girl in Honors Social Studies would beg and plead with the average pimple-faced wanker* to escort her to the junior prom. Afterwards, she would promptly bear his sixteen wanker-dominant Sci-Fi reading children. For you women-wankers, I'm sure we could arrange something similar, perhaps involving an artificial uterus. But one way or the other, us wankers are going to breed like wabbits!! Soon, very soon, all of humanity will weigh 300 pounds, wear a "Let-The-Wookie-Win" T-shirt, and generally resemble an animated blackhead! As wonderful as it will be to be among our own kind, however, I would strongly recommend that you have your olfactory nerves ablated. . . .

The True Nature of Love

Although esteemed by poets, lyricists and copy-writers of contraceptive ads, love is nothing more than a brain-process, a bunch of molecules and cells, vaguely akin to digestion or micturition. You wouldn't want to write a sonnet about micturition, would you? Not unless you're

**You know what a wanker is. Every high school has them. Though in some places they might be called whackers, weenies, or nerds.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

much weirder than our marketing research indicates. Nor should you romanticize love. The emotion of love is merely a spatial-temporal pattern of neuronal firing—slow it down slightly, and maybe it becomes insouciance. Speed it up, and maybe it becomes agoraphobia, who knows? It's important to realize that the major source of human motivation is nothing more than a bunch of little tiny lemons with teeny, tiny strips of copper and zinc stuck inside, all wired together like some third-rate science-fair project. Again, only the most dedicated wanker would write a sonnet about his science-fair project.

Now, it follows that if we could manipulate the brain cells that control love, we could turn the emotion off and on, like a beer-tap. We would then have the beginnings of a Love-Potion. To make a Love-Potion, then, we must first identify the specific brain circuits that mediate love. This is sort of analogous to reverse-engineering a personal computer, except there may be a quadrillion (10^{14}) as many circuits in a human brain as there are in even the most sophisticated PC.

How do we identify brain-circuits? Well, in lower vetebrates, we hack open their little skulls and then subject their tiny brains to various methods that allow us to correlate the activity of particular neurons with some physiological or behavioral process. To trace the brain circuits involved in vision, for instance, you might flash a light in the eyes of an anesthetized animal, and probe with an electrode which parts of the brain show increased neuronal firing in response to light.

The problem with this method is that you might have to examine all 10^{14} brain circuits before you could conclusively identify the love-circuit. Even if you could examine one circuit per second, this would still take you a million years, an interval that most federal funding agencies would be loath to support. Even if you were the Flash, and could perform experiments at seven times light-speed, this would only knock off 900,000 years or so, because neurons themselves are relatively slow entities, taking maybe a tenth of a second to convey a complicated message

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE BEST IN PBM

BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

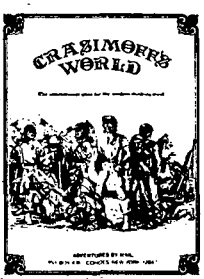
Beyond the Stellar Empire (BSE) is a science fiction role-playing game of unparalleled scope. You assume the persona of an interstellar starship captain interacting in the most detailed play-by-mail game ever created. BSE has it all; a multitude of unique solar systems composed of individually designed worlds, politics, and diplomacy, realistic economics and logistics, a comprehensive combat system, chartered companies and Imperial services, alien races, and exploration, invasion, and colonization of hostile planets.

TOP PBM GAME of 1983 and 1984

Beyond the Stellar Empire was chosen by editors of *GAMES* magazine as one of the top 100 games for both 1983 and 1984, the only PBM game so honored.

Complete Rules Package costs $5.00. Starter Package costs $17.00 and includes rules package, set-up, and two turns.

CRASIMOFF'S WORLD



Crasimoff's World is a PBM game of extraordinary quality and detail. Lead your party of fighters, magic users and priests through a fantastic land filled with adventure, magic, and danger. Each party member has a wide range of attributes and possessions. Loot dungeons, redeem swampmen heads for bounty, explore ancient ruins, raid dwarven encampments, and battle hill trolls in their underground domain. The world is complete in every detail; history, ecology, mythos, geography, and much, much more.

Complete Rules Package costs $3.00. Starter Package costs $15. -includes rules package, set-up, and two turns.

CAPITOL

Capitol is a fast playing strategic space warfare game that divides players into teams, pitting them against each other in an orgy of xenophobic fury. Capitol is unique in that it is a perfect introductory game for an individual new to play-by-mail games while at the same time detailed enough for the most experienced gamer.

Complete Rules Package costs $2.50. Starter Package costs $16.00 and includes rules package, set-up, and four turns.

Adventures By Mail has processed over 100,000 turns

WRITE OR CALL FOR OUR FREE DETAILED BROCHURES
MASTERCARD AND VISA CARD HOLDERS CAN START IN A GAME IMMEDIATELY BY TELEPHONING OUR HOTLINE SERVICE AT 518-237-4870

SEND CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS TO
ADVENTURES BY MAIL, P.O.B. 436, COHOES, N.Y. 12047

MONEYBACK GUARANTEE IF NOT SATISFIED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like "I'm-in-love!" Now, if the Flash wanted to map the love-circuit in Kid Flash or Supergirl, who have super-speed neurons, that would be a fundable experiment!

Alas, there is no Flash. I even have trouble believing in Isaac Asimov. There is a method of brain-circuit tracing, however, that lets the mortal scientist simultaneously examine all neurons for changes in activity. An animal is given a shot of radioactive glucose, and then its brain is scanned to determine which neurons have become radioactive in response to particular stimulation. Neurons are like your muscles—the more they work, the more glucose they use. It's hard work to make those little jolts of electricity that neurons use for signaling. My brain is maybe two percent of my body weight, yet it uses roughly 30 percent of my total metabolic output—a bit more when I read *Scientific American,* a bit less when I watch *Dallas*. About 40 percent of this blob of glucose goes to electrochemical signaling. Subjectively, you might think that your heart is your hardest working organ, given that it's always pounding away in your chest. Compared to how hard your brain works, your heart is a veritable welfare cheat, being roughly one percent of your total weight, and using only about 2 percent of your total metabolism. It is likely that one of the main functions of sleep is to give the little guys in your head a coffee break. Slow-wave sleep, the kind where you don't dream, reduces brain metabolism to a more restful 60 percent of the waking value.

By mixing in some radioactive glucose with the normal blood pool, we can keep track of how much work the neuron has done—the harder it works, the more radioactive glucose it uses, and the more radioactive it becomes. Afterwards, one slaughters the little animal, cuts closely-spaced sections through its brain with a kind of salami-slicer, and places the sections against photographic film. The radioactive glucose will emit an electron, which exposes the silver grains of the film in the same way that a photon would. If we flash a light in the animal's face while its brain cells slurp radioactive glucose, we would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

obtain a complete map of which brain areas are using glucose in response to a flashing light and how much glucose they're using. This in turn would tell us which brain circuits are involved in the processing of visual information.

This suggests an obvious way to map the brain-circuits of love. We grab some clown as he's falling in love, give him a shot of radioactive glucose in the tush, and then salami-slice his brain. Alas, such interesting experiments were outlawed in Nuremberg, back in 1946. Apparently, it's illegal even to do this on my noisome pet undergraduates. As it happens, however, there is a non-invasive version of the radioactive glucose method that can be legally applied to humans. Instead of electron-emitting glucose, you are given positron-emitting glucose. Positrons are anti-matter electrons, and as all good science-fiction wankers know, matter and anti-matter annihilate one another into a burst of gamma rays. Gamma rays have sufficient energy to penetrate even the thickest of skulls, so by placing detectors on your head, it's possible to locate the brain areas that are slurping up the positron-labeled glucose.

The problem with this technique is that is has limited anatomical resolution. At best, you can only map brain-circuits to within two millimeters of their actual position within a human brain. This is about 100 times less resolution than you get with the salami-slice method, about the minimum needed to identify closely-packed specific brain circuits. The two-millimeter limit is the average distance that a positron will travel before it collides with an electron. Unless we can locally change physical law within a human brain to lessen the kinetic energy of the emitted positron, we will be stuck with a blurry picture of the love circuit.

So, I'm really sorry. There's no apparent way to map the brain circuits for love, which means that we'll never be able to create a Love-Potion. I would also like to admit here that many of the other topics that I have discussed in this space, such as mind-transfer, super-powers and immortality are at best highly improbable, and in fact, are unlikely to ever occur. Frankly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you all should have known better than to believe what I write, just because I have a Ph.D. and am a professor at a prominent Ivy League University. I suppose I should apologize for this, but, heck, is it my fault if you're excessively gullible? Trying to live on an assistant professor's salary was the main reason Lex Luthor turned to World Conquest. If I hadn't turned to intellectual prostitution, I probably would have built a telepathic hypnosis amplifier, and you'd all be doing squat-thrusts now. For the sake of the magazine, however, if you subscribe, I hope you won't cancel your subscription. A strong subscriber base is important to a magazine like this, which has little advertising revenue. Please turn now to Mooney's Module. It's really funny this month! Incidentally, those of you who have admired my writing will be pleased to know that I will now author the monthly Style column for *Town and Country*. My topic for the next issue will be "cufflinks."

HO! HO! FOOLED YOU!! Of course, there's a way to map the brain circuits of love! One needs only to use a different technology!! Oh, Ha! Ha! Ha! Foolish Reader!! You did not realize this!! Perhaps you would like to volunteer for interesting experiment where we give you radioactive glucose in tush, and see with salami-slicer what brain-circuits don't work? Information may be helpful to genetic offspring and/or relatives!! Oh, *HA! HA!*

The technique I have in mind is called nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) tomography. I have described it in loving detail before as the possible basis of a mind-transfer machine (see the June 83 *IAsfm)*. Basically, a strong magnetic field is applied to the brain, flipping your spinning protons at right angles. Think of pushing a top to the ground. When the magnetic field is removed, the protons re-align themselves, emitting a radio pulse in the process, sort of like a squeak of indignation. By tomographic analysis of the radio pulse, it's possible to identify which proton out of the 10^{20}th or so in the human brain squeaked.

There is no theoretical limit to the anatomical resolution of an NMR brain scan. With a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Rich, beautiful, original."
—Piers Anthony

"Outstanding!"
Andre Norton

"Engaging!"
Publishers Weekly

THE SHATTERED WORLD

MICHAEL REAVES

A millennium ago magicians fought a war,
and smashed the world into a thousand pieces.
Horrified at the destruction,
they set the fragments to floating about each other
in the Abyss and supplied them with
an atmosphere that men and beasts could breathe.

But that was long ago.
In a thousand years even sorcerers grow old,
and so do their spells.
Already pieces of the Shattered World
begin to collide...

BAEN FANTASY BOOKS

MARCH
55951-6 · 416 pp. · $3.50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

"Stored in our little brains is the template of the Love-Object. The specifics of the template might be written in part by our genes. Under the right circumstances—we don't have a grant due the next day, we haven't gotten yet another rejection slip from *Analog*, we're not currently in love with someone else—when we encounter someone who matches the characteristics of the template, we fall in *love* with that person. The emotion of love is caused by the activation of a specific brain-circuit, and it is characterized by a slavish addiction to the template-matchee. It often leads to sex, though from personal experience, don't quote me on this."

sufficiently strong and uniform magnetic field, and a real smart computer to interpret the proton squeaks, it would be possible to measure changes in glucose utilization in the teensiest brain circuit. Thus, we could scan someone's brain as they fall in love and see what circuits change. This in turn would allow us to map the brain pathways that control love, the necessary prelude for developing a Love-Potion.

Small Animals In Love

Let us digress for a moment. Given how important love is, you might assume that some of this information would be known already. Nope. Almost nothing is known about the biological mechanisms of love. By contrast, we know almost everything about the biological mechanisms of micturition or digestion. Now, this is not because us scientists are more interested in a Big Mac and a healthy whizz than we are in love. Most scientists that I know have spouses or boy/girlfriends, and in between trying to blow up the world, really make time for their relationships. Nor is it because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there are no practical implications towards understanding the neural basis of love. Think of the tremendous gains in social productivity if a treatment existed for heartbreak or unrequited love. Do you know how many girls I fell in love with in high school? *Lots.* And nearly all regarded me with the same high esteem that's usually reserved for a *leper* with a loose *nose.* Heck, if there were a cure for love-sickness, I would have finished my telepathic hypnosis amplifier long ago.

The reason for this is probably twofold. For one thing, there hasn't been enough thought about the phenomenology of love. It is difficult to explain a process in mechanistic terms unless its phenomenology is clearly understood. What exactly do we mean when we say we're in love? The kind of love I'd like to induce with a Love-Potion is that slavish, consuming emotion that is to gothic novels what glucose is to the brain—"*She stared into Dr. Rainbow's steel-blue eyes, swooning over the cleft in his chin and his strong muscular arms. 'Watch me kill this rat and take out its brain!' he laughed in his cruelly handsome way. She almost fainted with ecstasy as his muscles flexed like steel cables, bearing down on the blade of the guillotine, deftly removing the head of the lower animal. 'That's one less potential carrier of the Bubonic Plague, and one more notch in the quiver of Brain Research!' he laughed again, his voice sending shivers of musty pleasure through her body.*" That sort of response would do just fine, thank you.

Now, the phenomenological question is to what extent slavish, romantic love is related to other kinds of love. Besides romantic love, there is the love between parent and child, between brother and sister, citizen and country, Young Urban Professional and Bass Weejums, science fiction writer and common ruminant, etc. If all love is different, maybe there are many different neuronal mechanisms, complicating the search for relevant brain-circuits. It seems to me, though, that all these types of love have, to one extent or another, the slavish, addicting nature of gothic, romantic love, and thus all probably draw upon the same neural mechanisms.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Where they differ is the extent that they activate the neural circuits for Sex, with patriotic love impinging little on these circuits, and ruminant Love impinging a lot.

This brings us to the other problem: We lack an animal-model for love. There is no evidence that romantic love occurs in other mammals besides the hominids. In fact, it has been suggested that the emotion evolved as a way of promoting the kind of long-lasting pair-bond that's necessary to raise sentient offspring. Non-sentient mammals, with briefer childhoods, would have less of a need to form enduring pair-bonds. The reason we understand so much about digestion and micturition is that other animals do these things as well, so consequently, we can unravel the mechanisms. Now, although monogamy may be as unknown to these little animals as it is to science fiction professionals at a WorldCon, they certainly have a lot of *sex*. Wanton, indiscriminant sex, in fact. Experiments can therefore be performed to elucidate the neural mechanisms of Rodent Lust, for example. Such experiments have told us a number of interesting things. For one, sexual drive, libido, depends on hormones. In rats, libido in both males and females is controlled by the hormone estrogen, while in primates, including humans, libido depends on testosterone. This might seem paradoxical to you, given that estrogen is a "female" hormone, and testosterone a "male" hormone, but in rats there are enzymes in the brain of males that convert testosterone to estrogen, while the adrenal glands of human females make testosterone. Remove the hormones from a rat or from a person, and you have something with all the sexual inclinations of a block of wood.

Now, if we give a rat radioactive estrogen or testosterone, we can again use the autoradiography trick to identify the brain regions that are targets for the hormones. The *hypothalamus*, a part of your brain that evolved about 400 million years ago, has the most neurons that concentrate the radioactive hormones. By tracing the connections of these cells to the rest of the brain, the neural

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHAT KIND OF P.B.M. PLAYER ARE YOU?

DO YOU LIKE TO WAIT QUIETLY FOR THE RIGHT TIME TO MAKE YOUR MOVE? LET THE OTHER PLAYERS MAKE THEIR POINTS WHILE YOU SEEM TO BE DOING NOTHING, AND THEN STRIKE FEAR IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEACEFUL PLAYERS? DO YOU ENJOY LETTING THE OTHER PLAYERS WONDER AND SPECULATE ON WHO YOUR VICTIMS WILL BE? THEN YOU SHOULD BE A **VENGEN** OR **HATEMUCH**.

DO YOU LIKE AN UNUSUAL AMOUNT OF CONTACT? WOULD YOU LIKE THE OTHER PLAYERS TO BE DEPENDENT UPON YOU FOR THEIR SUCCESS, AND BY HELPING THEM, PILE UP POINTS FOR YOURSELF? THEN YOU SHOULD BE A **NOVALL** OR **TRAVALL**.

WOULD YOU LIKE A WAITING LIST OF CUSTOMERS NEEDING YOUR SERVICES? WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE OTHER PLAYERS DOING YOU FAVORS, JUST TO KEEP ON YOUR GOOD SIDE? YOU SHOULD BE A **SELLER**.

DO YOU PREFER JUST A COUPLE OF FRIENDS AND ALLIES? WOULD YOU HAVE THEM BEGGING YOU FOR PROTECTION? PERHAPS FIGHT THEIR WARS AND HELP THEIR SIDE? THE **BADHUN** ROLE IS YOUR CUP OF TEA.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE THE CHALLENGE OF BEING CHASED AND HUNTED? HAVE THE OTHER PLAYERS TRYING TO FIND OUT YOUR IDENTITY, BEFORE YOU HAVE TOO MUCH OF A LEAD? AND IF THEY DO DISCOVER YOU, HAVING TO USE WHATEVER FORCE OR DIPLOMACY AVAILABLE TO SURVIVE? THE **SEEKER** WOULD INTEREST YOU.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE CONSIDERED A NUISANCE TO THE OTHER PLAYERS? JUST KEEP COMMING TOWARD THEM, AND DARING THEM TO STOP YOUR EXPANSION? HAVE THEM DESTROYING THEIR OWN POPULATIONS IN THE HOPE OF SLOWING YOUR PROGRESS? YOU SHOULD BE A **PUNCHER**.

PERHAPS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BUILD AN EMPIRE, AND HOLD IT AGAINST ALL THE BAD GUYS THAT WANT WHAT YOU HAVE. COMPETE FOR EXPANSION. TRY BEING A **GREEDEX**.

MAYBE YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE THE **PREHIST**. HAVING OTHER PLAYERS ACTUALLY GIVING YOU ENTIRE PLANETS, JUST SO THEY CAN USE YOUR BASIC PRODUCT. THE OTHER PLAYERS SEE YOUR POINTS GOING UP, BUT THEY NEED YOU TOO MUCH TO BOTHER YOU UNTIL YOU ARE TOO FAR AHEAD, AND TOO STRONG. THE **PREHIST** IS MADE TO ORDER FOR YOU.

ALL OF THE ABOVE ARE INCLUDED IN **GALACTIC CONFUSION!** GET IN THE ACTION EARLY! BE THE EXPERT THE OTHERS WILL DEPEND UPON IN A VERY SHORT TIME. SIMPLE RULES, BUT ENDLESS STRATEGY!

SEND $3.00 FOR THE RULES. IF YOU DON'T PLAY THE GAME, RETURN THE RULES FOR AN IMMEDIATE REFUND. IF YOU DO PLAY, THE COST OF THE RULES WILL COVER YOUR FIRST TURN. AFTER THAT THE TURNS ARE $3.00 EACH. THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR CALLING IN YOU TURNS. THERE IS NO SET UP FEE!

PIERCE & CO. DEPT. B
P. B. M.
P.O. BOX 25675
CHICAGO, IL. 60625

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

circuits for Rat Sex can be described. In rats, the signal from the hypothalamus is transmitted to older and newer parts of the brain, ultimately working its way to the spinal cord, where the muscles of sexual behavior are activated. We even have some idea of the biochemical mechanisms by which the hormones induce lust—specific genes are activated in these neurons that code for proteins which modify neuronal activity. Precisely which proteins are induced by the hormones is not yet known, but it is likely that they are proteins important in synaptic transmission.

This research won't help us make a Love-Potion, but it might tell us how to make an aphrodisiac. An aphrodisiac differs from a Love-Potion in that it induces only a non-specific lust rather than a slavish addiction to a particular person. In humans, testosterone could be considered an aphrodisiac, because prolonged treatment will increase libido. However, it may take several weeks for this to happen, and in women, testosterone has masculinizing side-effects. Personally, there have been too many bearded, horny women in my life. Alcohol and cannaboid drugs might also be regarded as aphrodisiacs, but they work by lowering inhibitions rather than by increasing desire. Again, from personal experience, they aren't that reliable. With information on the molecular basis of Rat Lust, we could design a *true* aphrodisiac. This might consist of a virus genetically-engineered to infect only those neurons in the sex circuit in the same way that polio virus infects only the motor neurons in your spinal cord. Once inside of the right brain cells, the virus would produce mass quantities of the proteins that induce lust, triggering a veritable epileptic fit of desire!

Moderate-Sized Hominids in Love

While I don't deny that such a thing would be useful, I wouldn't trust it. Given *my* track-record, any woman I infect would probably run off to a motel with an electric blender. A Love-Potion would be less prone to such embarrassing mishaps. So, to create a Love-Potion, we have to understand what conveys the specificity of Human Romantic Love—the "You're-a-nice-guy-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tom-but I don't-think-I-could-*love*-you" kind of comment. While there's no evidence that rodents or most other mammals feel romantic love, they do show preferences for particular sexual partners. What makes a rat sexually attractive to another rat is a complicated exchange of olfactory and auditory signals that communicate the reproductive status of individuals and the likelihood that viable offspring will be produced. In general, rat females tend to go for older, more successful males, while rat males generally prefer young nubile females. This is not a lot different from your typical Society for Neuroscience Meeting or Worldcon, except the rats might not slobber as much. Some of human romantic selectivity probably results from this kind of sociobiological computation—"Ew, he's a *wanker!* I could never maximize my reproductive fitness with him!! His genes are just too weird!!" And while that may explain why somebody like me watched *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* on prom night, there seemed to be a fair amount of selectivity even among the Popular Ones at Charles Boehm

"Think of the tremendous gains in social productivity if a treatment existed for heartbreak or unrequited love. Do you know how many girls I fell in love with in high school? *Lots.* And nearly all regarded me with the same high esteem that's usually reserved for a *leper* with a loose *nose.* Heck, if there were a cure for love-sickness, I would have finished my telepathic hypnosis amplifier long ago."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

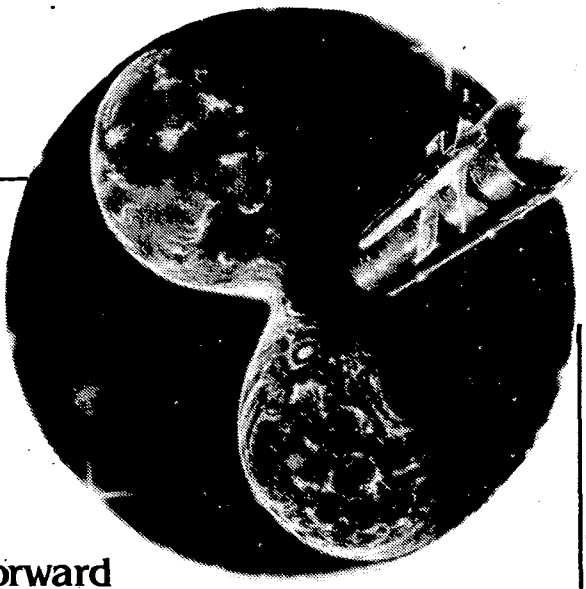
Junior High School, with one cheerleader preferring the wanker-loathing captain of the basketball team to the equally wanker-hating captain of the football team.

Perhaps, like with rats, this was done by pheromones: The Popular Ones did seem to *sniff* each other a lot. However, my initial attempts to collect vaginal secretions from the girls' cheerleading squad were frustrated by the impromptu re-sectioning of my colon by the aforementioned captain of the basketball team. My other working hypothesis was that the Popular Ones had a *template* of their Love-Object: Stored away in their Duckbill Platypus-like brains was a model of their ideal mate. They constantly compared the characteristics of their fellow Popular Ones with this stored model, and when they found somebody that matched to an 80 percent criterion or better—Bingo! Make-Out City! Cruise missiles work by template-matching—they're programmed to compare landscape features with particular targets, and blow them up if they match.

What is the evidence for love as a cruise-missile? Well, when I have gotten the "Sorry-Tom-but-I-can't-*love*-you" line, I usually asked why this was so. The response I got most often was, "Because-you're-not-my-type." Well, this implies that there is template-matching going on. While in most of these cases, the template-matching was simply the "Avoid-Hideous-Wankers!" kind, I have also heard this comment from wanker-females, with whom I was generally acknowledged as suitable breeding material. Strangely, very few of these females could tell me what their type really was, just that *I* wasn't it. It's sort of like the difference between recognizing that you've heard a particular song, and actually being able to sing it: The latter is usually more difficult.

How is our template programmed? Well, introspectively, it seems that I have more or less fallen in love with the same sort of female since my first crushes in kindergarten. This suggests that the template is established relatively early in life, before the age of 4 or 5. A Freudian might say that we fall in love with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



A BRAND-NEW NOVEL BY THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *DRAGON'S EGG*

Robert L. Forward

THE FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY

"His SF-scientific imagination is unsurpassed...this is a must!"
— *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

"Outshines *Dragon's Egg*...rates a solid ten on my mind-boggle scale. If there were a Hugo for the most enjoyable alien creation, the flouwen would be frontrunners." — *LOCUS*

"I much enjoyed *The Flight of the Dragonfly*. Part of my enjoyment came from knowing that the man damned well knows what he's talking about...." — *LARRY NIVEN*

FEBRUARY
BAEN BOOKS
55937-0 384 pp. • $3.50

The future is NOW!

Distributed by Simon & Schuster Mass Merchandise Sales Company
1230 Avenue of the Americas • New York, N.Y. 10020

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people that remind us of our mothers or fathers. No offense to my mother, who occasionally reads these things, but the females I have been smitten with from kindergarten through graduate school have been *nothing* like my mother. I would be more inclined to believe that the template bears only a random resemblance to the opposite-sex parent. Is the template determined by your genes? Well, maybe. This would make sense from the sociobiological perspective—your genes would then specify what mate would have the most desirable characteristics for improving the fitness of your offspring, and hence the number of copies of your genes. Making you happy would be largely irrelevant to this, which explains why so many of my *amours* could have been Darth Vader with a sex-change. One testable prediction of this would be that identical twins would tend to fall in love with the same kind of person. Strangely, such a basic question has never been studied. Maybe it's because identical twins not only love the same kind of person, but they love the *same* person, and it's so difficult to schedule a date with him that they never have time to talk to sociobiologists. It's possible! Also, maybe there are elves! Both good and bad ones! Maybe Shawna will pay me a million dollars for this article!

A Love-Potion

To summarize what I've said about the neural mechanisms of love: Stored in our little brains is the template of the Love-Object. The specifics of the template might be written in part by our genes. Under the right circumstances—we don't have a grant due the next day, we haven't gotten yet another rejection slip from *Analog*, we're not currently in love with someone else—when we encounter someone who matches the characteristics of the template, we fall in *love* with that person. The emotion of love is caused by the activation of a specific brain-circuit, and it is characterized by a slavish addiction to the template-matchee. It often leads to sex, though from personal experience, don't quote me on this.

The ideal Love-Potion would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

make use of all aspects of this model. It would re-program the template, stimulate the Love-Circuit, and for good measure, turn on those lust-neurons. Maybe it would also work on your auditory neurons, so that you'd hear wedding bells! Again, we could imagine that this could be done with one or more viruses genetically engineered to infect only those neurons that make up the template and love/lust circuits. Inside of these neurons, the viruses would instruct the cells to produce currently unknown proteins that would alter the template and induce love and lust. Viruses can make proteins very quickly, so it could take only minutes for the Love-Potion to work. We could re-program the template in different ways. One way would be to make it completely non-specific so that the victim would fall in love with the first person he or she would see. This would result in the classic Love-Potion of science-fiction and fantasy. Another way would be to make it very specific, such that the infected person would fall in Love with only those persons, who, say, have a Ph.D. in neuroscience, faculty positions at Ivy League Universities, *and* who write for pulp science-fiction magazines. One could then introduce this virus into the water supply of New York City, for instance. Given my luck at both romance and biochemistry, my virus would probably only affect females over the age of eighty, all males, and the animals in the Central Park Zoo.

Sigh! Once a wanker, always a wanker. On a good day, I manage to spill only two cups of coffee on my pants, and generally remember to pull up my zipper, or at least, no one *sees* me pull up my zipper. Besides being sodomized by the New York Rangers or by a love-crazed moose, what other consequences might there be to a Love-Potion? Well, too strong a dose might cause problems. The victim could become so jealous that you would be forbidden to have any contact with the opposite sex and be forced to spend the rest of your life in a male or female harem. Also, too large a dose might cause more enduring effects than you would like. I am reminded of a story in *Eerie* comics where a woman used a Love-Potion to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ensnare a man, who then promptly died in an auto accident. The effects of the Love-Potion were so strong that his mangled, rotted corpse arose from the grave to be with his bride. I always thought that this kind of story was one of the better arguments for cremation.

An even more insidious consequence might be that you would become bored with one-sided relationships. Let's say that the typical wanker male infects a typical Popular One cheerleader with the Love-Virus. Within minutes, she's forgotten about her boyfriend Blacky, the captain of the squash team, and is now madly in love with Euthideus, who is basically a walking pimple. Initially, Euthideus is ecstatic that he finally has a girlfriend, particularly one that's not 300 pounds and who doesn't sweat like a lawn-sprinkler. They do all of his favorite things together—go to direct-sale comic book stores, see *Star Trek III* for the 234th time, write sonnets about his science-fair projects. And she loves it all. Eventually, however, Euthideus realizes that he could probably back a cement truck over her and she'd love that, too. There is no tension, no reciprocity in the relationship. Thanks to the virus, it is irrelevant whether Euthideus loves her—she'll still love him. Eventually, he tires of this cloying, mewing female, gives her a shot of an anti-viral drug and returns her to Blacky. However, once she's again indifferent to him, if not contemptuous, he falls in love all over again, and wants to re-infect her.

What's the Moral? *Once a wanker, always a wanker.* The Pimple-Face should have infected some *other* cheerleader. When he got bored with that one, he could have infected *another* one. That's how science fiction professionals do it! Guys like Euthideus make me ashamed of my origins. Here I am, struggling to get tenure so I can help the wanker community obtain the kind of weaponry that the guys at Livermore Labs would give their frontal lobes for, and some clown like this turns it down because he's not in *love!* For what does he think I'm going to write? *Town and Country?!* About *cuff-links!?* The last time I tried to wear cuff-links I got those little hooks caught in my *zipper*. I had to be cut out of my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pants. I know! I know! I saw *Return of the Jedi* as many times as you did: You-Can't-Escape-Your-Destiny. ●

References

For more about the sex-circuit, read *Estrogens and Brain Function* by D.W. Pfaff, Springer-Verlag, 1980. This is yet another senior neuroscientist who'd force me to take my old paper-route if he knew I'd mentioned his name in a science fiction magazine. (Don't tell him!) More about brain glucose mapping can be found in the article "Brain-Watch" by Julie Ann Miller, in *Science News* vol 119, pp76-78, 1981. See also the article by M. Ter-Pogossian *et al* "Positron-Emission Tomography," *Scientific American,* vol 243, pp170-181, Oct. 1980. I'm also supposedly writing a book on this stuff *Quantitative Autoradiographic Methods in Neurochemistry,* Alan R. Liss, but, gee, between all these Viewpoints and my science-fiction stories that don't sell, I just haven't done much on it—*Once a.wanker* . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by Gregory Benford

TIME'S RUB

art: Hank Jonkus

* 1983 by Abbenford Associates

Gregory Benford's best known work is probably the novel, *Timescape* (1980), which won the Nebula award, the British Science Fiction award, the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, and the Australian Ditmar award for International Novel. His latest novels include *Across the Sea of Suns* (1984) and *Against Infinity* (1983).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1.

At Earth's winter ebb, two crabbed figures slouched across a dry, cracked plain.

Running before a victor who was himself slow-dying, the dead stench of certain destiny cloyed to them. They knew it. Yet kept on, grinding over plum-colored shales.

They shambled into a pitwallow for shelter, groaning, carapaces grimed and discolored. The smaller of them, Xen, turned toward the minimal speck of burnt-yellow sun, but gained little aid through its battered external panels. It grasped Faz's extended pincer,—useless now, mauled in battle—and murmured of fatigue.

"We can't go on."

Faz, grimly: "We must."

Xen was a functionary, an analytical sort. It had chanced to flee the battle down the same gully as Faz, the massive, lumbering leader. Xen yearned to see again its mate, Pymr, but knew this for the forlorn dream it was.

They crouched down. Their enemies rumbled in nearby ruined hills. A brown murk rose from those distant movements. The sun's pale eye stretched long shadows across the plain, inky hiding places for the encroaching others.

Thus when the shimmering curtains of ivory luminescence began to fog the hollow, Xen thought the end was here—that energy drain blurred its brain, and now brought swift, cutting death.

Fresh in from the darkling plain? the voice said. Not acoustically—this was a Vac Zone, airless for millennia.

"What? Who's that?" Faz answered.

Your ignorant armies clashed last night?

"Yes," Xen acknowledged ruefully, "and were defeated. Both sides lost."

Often the case.

"Are the Laggenmorphs far behind us?" Faz asked, faint tracers of hope skating crimson in its spiky voice.

No. They approach. They have tracked your confused alarms of struggle and flight.

"We had hoped to steal silent."

Your rear guard made a melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.

Xen: "They escaped?"

Into the next world, yes.

"Oh."

"Who *is* that?" Faz insisted, clattering its treads.

A wraith. Glittering skeins danced around them. A patchy acrid tang

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

laced the curling vacuum. **In this place having neither brass, nor earth, nor boundless sea.**

"Come out!" Faz called at three gigaHertz. "We can't see you."

Need you?

"Are you Laggenmorphs?" Panic laded Faz's carrier wave a bright, fervid orange. "We'll fight, I warn you!"

"Quiet," Xen said, suspecting.

The descending dazzle thickened, struck a bass note. **Laggenmorphs? I do not even know your terms.**

"Your name, then," Xen said.

Sam.

"What's that? That's no name!" Faz declared, its voice a shifting brew of fear and anger.

Sam it was and Sam it is. Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outlive it.

Xen murmured at a hundred kiloHertz, "Traditional archaic name. I dimly remember something of the sort. I doubt it's a trap."

The words not yet free of its antenna, Xen ducked—for a relativistic beam passed not a kilometer away, snapping with random rage. It forked to a ruined scree of limestone and erupted into a self-satisfied yellow geyser. Stones pelted the two hunkering forms, clanging.

A mere stochastic volley. Your sort do expend energies wildly. That is what first attracted me.

Surly, Faz snapped, "You'll get no surge from us."

I did not come to sup. I came to proffer.

A saffron umbra surrounded the still-gathering whorls of crackling, clotted iridescence.

"Where're you hiding?" Faz demanded. It brandished blades, snouts, cutters, spikes, double-bore nostrils that could spit lurid beams.

In the cupped air.

"There *is* no air," Xen said. "This channel is open to the planetary currents."

Xen gestured upward with half-shattered claw. There, standing in space, the playing tides of blue-white, gauzy light showed that they were at the base of a great translucent cylinder. Its geometric perfection held back the moist air of Earth, now an ocean tamed by skewed forces. On the horizon, at the glimmering boundary, purpling clouds nudged futilely at their constraint like hungry cattle. This cylinder led the eye up to a vastness, the stars a stilled snowfall. Here the thin but persistent wind from the sun could have free run, gliding along the orange-slice sections of the Earth's dipolar magnetic fields. The winds crashed down, sputtering, delivering kiloVolt glories where the cylinder cut them. Crackling yellow sparks grew there, a forest with all trunks ablaze and branches

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

PLAY BY MAIL GAME

a product of Entertainment Concepts, Inc.

Do you dream of adventure and glory? Do you thirst for dangers to thwart? Do you love the challenges of a mystery? Do you hunger to explore the unknown, and prove to the world that **you** have the stuff heroes are made of? **Yes??**

Then an exciting world of quests, myths, treasures, villains, mysteries, and magics is waiting **just for you!!** You can go beyond mere reading of adventure, **you** can now Create it! Experience it! Master it! Your skill, your wits, your wisdom, can make your hero the stuff of legend! You'll experience the full mystery and excitement of the fabulous **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®** adventure game by taking the role of a **Hero**, or of a **Fellowship** of four young adventurers!

ENTER TODAY!! Tomorrow you'll be creating your **own** legends!!!

Send AD&D® Play by Mail Game entries to: ECI, 6923 Pleasant Dr., Charlotte, NC 28211

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Enclosed is $10 for the first position and $5 for each additional Position. Each move is $4 of adventure, mystery, and ancient lore!

Please send me ___ **Hero** Positions and ___ **Fellowship** Positions.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is the registered trademark owned and used under license from TSR, Inc

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of lightning, beckoning far aloft like a brilliantly lit casino in a gray dark desert.

How well I know. I stem from fossiled days.

"Then why—"

This is my destiny and my sentence.

"To live here?" Faz was beginning to suspect as well.

For a wink or two of eternity.

"Can you . . ." Faz poked the sky with a horned, fused launcher. ". . . reach up there? Get us a jec?"

I do not know the term.

Xen said, "An injection. A megaVolt, say, at a hundred kiloAmps. A mere microsecond would boost me again. I could get my crawlers working."

I would have to extend my field lines.

"So it *is* true," Xen said triumpantly. "There still dwell Ims on the Earth. And you're one."

Again, the term—

"An Immortal. You have the fieldcraft."

Yes.

Xen knew of this, but had thought it mere legend. All material things were mortal. Cells were subject to intruding impurities, cancerous insults, a thousand coarse alleyways of accident. Machines, too, knew rust and wear, could suffer the ruthless scrubbing of their memories by a random bolt of electromagnetic violence. Hybrids, such as Xen and Faz, shared both half-worlds of erosion.

But there was a Principle which evaded time's rub. Order could be imposed on electrical currents—much as words rode on radio waves—and then the currents could curve into self-involved equilibria. If spun just so, the mouth of a given stream eating its own tail, then a spinning ring generated its own magnetic fields. Such work was simple. Little children made these loops, juggled them into humming fireworks.

Only genius could knit these current whorls into a fully-contorted globe. The fundamental physics sprang from ancient Man's bottling of thermonuclear fusion in magnetic strands. That was a simple craft, using brute magnets and artful metallic vessels. Far harder, to apply such learning to wisps of plasma alone.

The Principle stated that if, from the calm center of such a weave, the magnetic field always increased, in all directions, then it was stable to all manner of magnetohydrodynamic pinches and shoves.

The Principle was clear, but stitching the loops—history had swallowed that secret. A few had made the leap, been translated into surges of magnetic field. They dwelled in the Vac Zones, where the rude bump of air molecules could not stir their calm currents. Such were the Ims.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You . . . live forever?" Xen asked wonderingly.

Aye, a holy spinning toroid—when I rest. Otherwise, distorted, as you see me now. Phantom shoots of burnt yellow. **What once was Man, is now aurora—where winds don't sing, the sun's a tarnished nickel, the sky's a blank rebuke.**

Abruptly, a dun-colored javelin shot from nearby ruined hills, vectoring on them.

"Laggenmorphs!" Faz sent. "I have no defense."

Halfway to them, the lance burst into scarlet plumes. The flames guttered out.

A cacaphony of eruptions spat from their left. Grey forms leaptforward, sending scarlet beams and bursts. Sharp metal cut the smoking stones.

"Pymr, sleek and soft, I loved you," Xen murmured, thinking this was the end.

But from the space around the Laggenmorphs condensed a chalky stuff—smothering, consuming. The forms fell dead.

I saved you.

Xen bowed, not knowing how to thank a wisp. But the blur of nearing oblivion weighed like stone.

"Help us!" Faz's despair lanced like pain through the dead vacuum. "We need energy."

You would have me tick over the tilt of Earth, run through solstice, bring ringing summer in an hour?

Xen caught in the phosphorescent stipple a green underlay of irony.

"No, no!" Faz spurted. "Just a jec. We'll go on then."

I can make you go on forever.

The flatness of it, accompanied by phantom shoots of scorched orange, gave Xen pause. "You mean . . . the fieldcraft? Even I know such lore is not lightly passed on. Too many Ims, and the Earth's magnetic zones will be congested."

I grow bored, encased in this glassy electromagnetic shaft. I have not conferred the fieldcraft in a long while. Seeing you come crawling from your mad white chaos, I desired company. I propose a Game.

"Game?" Faz was instantly suspicious. "Just a jec, Im, that's all we want."

You may have that as well.

"What're you spilling about?" Faz asked.

Xen said warily, "It's offering the secret."

"What?" Faz laughed dryly, a flat cynical burst that rattled down the frequencies.

Faz churned an extruded leg against the grainy soil, wasting energy in its own consuming bitterness. It had sought fame, dominion, a sliver

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of history. Its divisions had been chewed and spat out again by the Laggenmorphs, its feints ignored, bold strokes adroitly turned aside. Now it had to fly vanquished beside the lesser Xen, dignity gathered like tattered dress about its fleeing ankles.

"Ims never share *that*. A dollop, a jec, sure—but not the turns of field-craft." To show it would not be fooled, Faz spat chalky ejecta at a nearby streamer of zinc-laden light.

I offer you my Game.

The sour despair in Faz spoke first. "Even if we believe that, how do we know you don't cheat?"

No answer. But from the high hard vault there came descending a huge ribbon of ruby light—snaking, flexing, writing in strange tongues on the emptiness as it approached, fleeting messages of times gone—auguries of innocence lost, missions forgot, dim songs of the wide world and all its fading sweets. The ruby snake split, rumbled, turned eggshell blue, split and spread and forked down, blooming into a hemisphere around them. It struck and ripped the rock, spitting fragments over their swiveling heads, booming. Then prickly silence.

"I see," Xen said.

Thunder impresses, but it's lightning does the work.

"Why should the Im cheat, when it could short us to ground, fry us to slag?" Xen sent to Faz on tightband.

"Why anything?" Faz answered, but there was nodding in the tone.

2.

The Im twisted the local fields and caused to appear, hovering in fried light, two cubes—one red, one blue.

You may choose to open either the Blue cube alone, or both.

Though brightened by a borrowed kiloAmp jolt from Xen, Faz had expended many Joules in irritation and now flagged. "What's . . . in . . . them?"

Their contents are determined by what I have already predicted. I have already placed your rewards inside. You can choose Red and Blue both, if you want. In that case, following my prediction, I have placed in the Red cube the bottled-up injection you wanted.

Faz unfurled a metallic tentacle for the Red cube.

Wait. If you will open both boxes, then I have placed in the Blue nothing—nothing at all.

Faz said, "Then I get the jec in the Red cube, and when I open the Blue—nothing."

Correct.

Xen asked, "What if Faz *doesn't* open both cubes?"

The only other option is to open the Blue alone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LORDS OF CREATION®

The fascinating new role-playing adventure game from The Avalon Hill Game Company

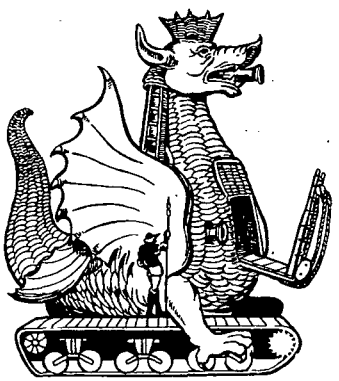
LORDS OF CREATION adventures can take place in any setting the Game Master can imagine. Typical settings include fantasy, science fiction, time travel, alternate dimensions, mystery thriller, parallel worlds, horror and science fantasy, yet the game is in no way "generic" and has its own consistent theme. The combat system is designed to handle any situation from sword play through rifle fire to blaster shots, plus psychic, futuristic and magical powers.

Lords of Creation®
$12.00

Basic Game complete with:
64-page Rules Book
64-page Book of Foes
Set of Polyhedral Dice

Horn of Roland®
$8.00

Expansion Module #1 complete with:
48-page Adventure
Multiple Player Aid Handouts



Characters begin the game as "normal" humans, but there is no limit to how powerful the characters can become. The gaming system is reasonably simple, with additional and optional rules that can be added as the basic rules are mastered. The game system even allows Game Masters to add their own rules, if desired.

The Avalon Hill Game Company
4517 HARFORD ROAD, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21214

Available wherever great games are sold!
For Credit Card Purchasing
call TOLL FREE 800-638-9292

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And I get nothing?" Faz asked.

No. In that case, I have placed the, ah, "jec" in the Red cube. But in the Blue I have put the key to my own fieldcraft—the designs for immortality.

"I don't get it. I open Red, I get my jec—right?" Faz said, sudden interest giving it a spike of scarlet brilliance at three gigaHertz. "Then I open Blue, I get immortality. That's what I want."

True. But in that case, I have predicted that you will pick both cubes. Therefore, I have left the Blue cube empty.

Faz clattered its treads. "I get immortality if I choose the Blue cube *alone*? But you have to have *predicted* that. Otherwise I get nothing."

Yes.

Xen added, "*If* you have predicted things perfectly."

But I always do.

"Always?"

Nearly always. I am immortal, ageless—but not God. Not . . . yet.

"What if I pick Blue and you're wrong?" Faz asked. "Then I get nothing."

True. But highly improbable.

Xen saw it. "All this is done *now*? You've already made your prediction? Placed the jec or the secret—or both—in the cubes?"

Yes. I made my predictions before I even offered the Game.

Faz asked, "What'd you predict?"

Merry pink laughter chimed across the slumbering megaHertz. **I will not say. Except that I predicted correctly that you both would play, and that you particularly would ask that question. Witness.**

A sucking jolt lifted Faz from the stones and deposited it nearby. Etched in the rock beneath where Faz had crouched was *What did you predict?* in a rounded, careful hand.

"It had to have been done during the overhead display, before the game began," Xen said wonderingly.

"The Im *can* predict," Faz said respectfully.

Xen said, "Then the smart move is to open both cubes."

Why?

"Because you've already made your choice. If you predicted that Faz would choose both, and he opens only the Blue, then he gets nothing."

True, and as I said before, very improbable.

"So," Xen went on, thinking quickly under its pocked sheen of titanium, "if you predicted that Faz would choose *only* the Blue, then Faz might as well open both. Faz will get both the jec and the secret."

Faz said, "Right. And that jec will be useful in getting away from here."

Except that there is every possibility that I already predicted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his choice of both cubes. In that case I have left only the jec in the Red Cube, and nothing in Blue.

"But you've already chosen!" Faz blurted. "There isn't any probable-this or possible-that at all."

True.

Xen said, "The only uncertainty is, how good a predictor are you."

Quite.

Faz slowed, flexing a crane arm in agonized frustration. "I . . . dunno . . . I got . . . to think . . ."

There's world enough, and time.

"Let me draw a diagram," said Xen, who had always favored the orderly over the dramatic. This was what condemned it to a minor role in roiling battle, but perhaps that was a blessing. It drew upon the gritty soil some boxes: "There," Xen wheezed. "This is the payoff matrix."

		THE IM	
		Predicts you will take only what's in Blue	Predicts you will take what's in both
YOU	Take only what is in Blue	immortality	nothing
	Take what is in both Red and Blue	immortality and jec	jec

As solemn and formal as Job's argument with God.

Enraptured with his own creation, Xen said, "Clearly, taking only the Blue cube is the best choice. The chances that the Im are wrong are very small. So you have a great chance of gaining immortality."

"That's crazy," Faz mumbled. "If I take both cubes, I at *least* get a jec, even if the Im *knew* I'd choose that way. And with a jec, I can make a run for it from the Laggenmorphs."

"Yes. Yet it rests on faith," Xen said. "Faith that the Im's predicting is near-perfect."

"Ha!" Faz snorted. "Nothing's perfect."

A black thing scorched over the rim of the pitwallow and exploded into fragments. Each bit dove for Xen and Faz, like shrieking, elongated eagles baring teeth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And each struck something invisible but solid. Each smacked like an insect striking the windshield of a speeding car. And was gone.

"They're all around us!" Faz cried.

"Even with a jec, we might not make it out," Xen said.

True. But translated into currents, like me, with a subtle knowledge of conductivities and diffusion rates, you can live forever.

"Translated . . ." Xen mused.

Free of entropy's swamp.

"Look," Faz said, "I may be tired, drained, but I know logic. You've already *made* your choice, Im—the cubes are filled with whatever you put in. What I choose to do now can't change that. So I'll take *both* cubes."

Very well.

Faz sprang to the cubes. They burst open with a popping ivory radiance. From the red came a blinding bolt of a jec. It surrounded Faz's antennae and cascaded into the creature.

Drifting lightly from the blue cube came a tight-wound thing, a shifting ball of neon-lit string. Luminous, writhing rainbow worms. They described the complex web of magnetic field geometries that were immortality's craft. Faz seized it.

You won both. I predicted you would take only the blue. I was wrong.

"Ha!" Faz whirled with renewed energy.

Take the model of the forcecraft. From it you can deduce the methods.

"Come on, Xen!" Faz cried with sudden ferocity. It surged over the lip of the pitwallow, firing at the distant, moving shapes of the Laggenmorphs, full once more of spit and dash. Leaving Xen.

"With that jec, Faz will make it."

I predict so, yes. You could follow Faz. Under cover of its armory, you would find escape—that way.

The shimmer vectored quick a green arrow to westward, where clouds billowed white. There the elements still governed and mortality walked.

"My path lies homeward, to the south."

Bound for Pymr.

"She is the one true rest I have."

You could rest forever.

"Like you? Or Faz, when it masters the . . . translation?"

Yes. Then I will have company here.

"Aha! That is your motivation."

In part.

"What else, then?"

There are rules for immortals. Ones you cannot understand . . . yet.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the dunes of Frank Herbert to the chronicles of Thomas Convenant to the delights of Tolkien...

Experience ALL the best-selling hard-to-find Science Fiction and Fantasy you dare to imagine... in low-cost paperbacks.

If you crave the excitement and adventure of good science fiction and fantasy but hate waiting in line to buy your favorites...If you buy a lot but hate to pay expensive hardcover prices...If you want them all but don't want to join a book club ...It's time you discovered the **other** way to buy the bestsellers. A way that's quick, convenient and easy on your pocketbook—The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog!

Over 650 Titles to choose from!

If you shopped for months you'd never find the 100's of bestsellers you find in minutes in The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog. Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Phillip Jose Farmer, Star Wars, Battlestar Gallactica...all the best science fiction and fantasy storytellers are here. Not just one or two of an author's titles, but everything in print! And the largest selection of popular adult science fiction and fantasy available. Over 650 titles in all, from hard-to-find to soon-to-be released. All in the most inexpensive paperback editions!

Having The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog is like having the bookstore come to you. Not just any bookstore. But one that specializes in out-of-this-world adventure! And unlike high pressure clubs there are no catches or rules. You buy any number of books when **you** want to buy them. No "automatic shipments" of books you never ordered but have to pay for!

Easy ordering, fast delivery!

Ordering from The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog is easy. You can charge books by mail or over the phone (for even speedier service). No waiting on out-of-stock titles...our giant inventory ensures prompt delivery. Right to your door, of course. And you pay only a minimum handling charge for the luxury of shopping at home—unhurried and hassle-free.

How to Order your Shop-At-Home Catalog Right Away.

To receive The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Catalog, send $1.00 with the coupon below. Then sit back and prepare for excitement in the comfort of your armchair...at prices you can always afford. Shopping at home for bestsellers. Once you've tried it, you'll find there is no other way.

☐ I want to shop at home for best-selling sci-fi and fantasy at low paperback prices! Rush me The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog. I've enclosed $1.00 to cover postage and handling.

☐ Send me all five Shop-At-Home Paperback Catalogs —Science Fiction and Fantasy, Mystery, Western, Romance, and Fiction/Non-Fiction. I've enclosed $2.00 to cover postage and handling.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Mail coupon to:
BOOK MAILING SERVICE
Box 690 Dept A 4
Rockville Center, NY 11571

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If you can predict so well, with Godlike power, then I should choose only the Blue cube."

True. Or as true as true gets.

"But if you predict so well, my 'choice' is mere illusion. It was foreordained."

That old saw? I can see you are . . . determined . . . to have free will.

"Or free won't."

Your turn.

"There are issues here . . ." Xen transmitted only ruby ruminations, murmuring like surf on a distant shore.

Distant boomings from Faz's retreat. The Red and Blue cubes spun, sparkling, surfaces rippled by ion-acoustic modes. The game had been reset by the Im, whose curtains of gauzy green shimmered in anticipation.

There must be a Game, you see.

"Otherwise there is no free will?"

That is indeed one of our rules. Observant, you are. I believe I will enjoy the company of you, Xen, more than that of Faz.

"To be . . . an immortal . . ."

A crystalline paradise, better than blind Milton's scribbled vision.

A cluster of dirty-brown explosions ripped the sky, rocked the land.

I cannot expend my voltages much longer. Would that we had wit enough, and time, to continue this parrying.

"All right." Xen raised itself up and clawed away the phosphorescent layers of both cubes.

The Red held a shimmering jec.

The Blue held nothing.

Xen said slowly, "So you predicted correctly."

Yes. Sadly, I knew you too well.

Xen radiated a strange sensation of joy, unlaced by regret. It surged to the lip of the crumbling pitwallow.

"Ah . . ." Xen sent a lofting note. "I am like a book, old Im. No doubt I would suffer in translation."

A last glance backward at the wraith of glow and darkness, a gesture of salute, then: "On! To sound and fury!" and it was gone forever.

3.

In the stretched silent years there was time for introspection. Faz learned the lacy straits of Earth's magnetic oceans, its tides and times. It sailed the bright magnetosphere and spoke to steel-blue stars.

The deep-etched memories of that encounter persisted. It never saw Xen again, though word did come vibrating through the field lines of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Xen's escape, of zestful adventures out in the raw territory of air and Man. There was even a report that Xen had itself and Pymr decanted into full Manform, to taste the pangs of cell and membrane. Clearly, Xen had lived fully after that solstice day. Fresh verve had driven that blithe new spirit.

Faz was now grown full, could scarcely be distinguished from the Im who gave the fieldcraft. Solemn and wise, its induction, conductivity, and ruby glinting dielectrics a glory to be admired, it hung vast and cold in the sky. Faz spoke seldom and thought much.

Yet the Game still occupied Faz. It understood with the embedded viewpoint of an Immortal now, saw that each side in the game paid a price. The Im could convey the fieldcraft to only a few, and had nearly exhausted itself; those moments cost millennia.

The sacrifice of Faz was less clear.

Faz felt itself the same as before. Its memories were stored in Alfven waves—stirrings of the field lines, standing waves between Earth's magnetic poles. They would be safe until Earth itself wound down, and the dynamo at the nickel-iron core ceased to replenish the fields. Perhaps, by that time, there would be other field lines threading Earth's, and the Ims could spread outward, blending into the galactic currents.

There were signs that such an end had come to other worlds. The cosmic rays which sleeted down perpetually were random, isotropic, which meant they had to be scattered from magnetic waves between the stars. If such waves were ordered, wise—it meant a vast community of even greater Ims.

But this far future did not concern Faz. For it, the past still sang, gritty and real.

Faz asked the Im about that time, during one of their chance auroral meetings, beside a cascading crimson churn.

The way we would put it in my day, the Im named Sam said, **would be that the software never knows what the original hardware was.**

And that was it, Faz saw. During the translation, the original husk of Faz had been exactly memorized. This meant determining the exact locations of each atom, every darting electron. By the quantum laws, to locate perfectly implied that the measurement imparted an unknown, but high, momentum to each speck. So to define a thing precisely then destroyed it.

Yet there was no external way to prove this. Both before and after translation, there was an exact Faz.

The copy did not know it was embedded in different . . . hardware . . . than the original.

So immortality was a concept with legitimacy purely seen from the outside. From the inside . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Somewhere, a Faz had died that this Faz might live.

. . . And how did any sentience know it was not a copy of some long-gone original?

One day, near the sheath that held back the atmosphere, Faz saw a man waving. It stood in green and vibrant wealth of life, clothed at the waist, bronzed. Faz attached a plasma transducer at the boundary and heard the figure say, "You're Faz, right?"

Yes, in a way. And you . . . ?

"Wondered how you liked it."

Xen? Is that you?

"In a way."

You knew.

"Yes. So I went in the opposite direction—into this form."

You'll die soon.

"You've died already."

Still, in your last moments, you'll wish for this.

"No. It's not how long something lasts, it's what that something means." With that the human turned, waved gaily, and trotted into a nearby forest.

This encounter bothered Faz.

In its studies and learned colloquy, Faz saw and felt the tales of Men. They seemed curiously convoluted, revolving about Self. What mattered most to those who loved tales was how they concluded.

Yet all Men knew how each individual's story ended. Their little dreams were rounded with a sleep. So the point of a tale was not how it ended, but *what it meant.* The great inspiring epic rage of Man was to find that lesson, buried in a grave.

As each year waned, Faz reflected, and knew that Xen had seen this point. Immortality glimpsed from without, by those who could not know the inner Self—Xen did not want that. So it misled the Im, and got the mere jec that it wanted.

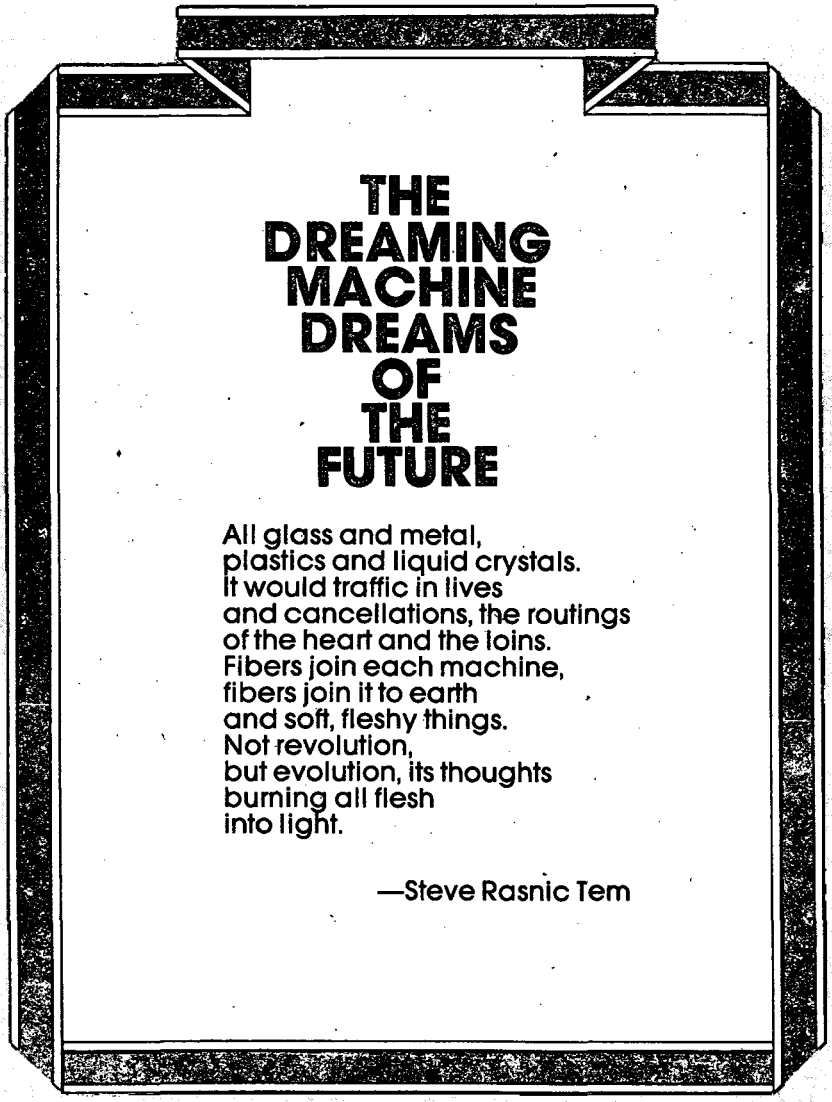
Xen chose life—not to be a monument of unaging intellect, gathered into the artifice of eternity.

In the brittle night Faz wondered if it had chosen well itself. And knew. *Nothing* could be sure it was itself the original. So the only intelligent course lay in enjoying whatever life a being felt—living like a mortal, in the moment. Faz had spent so long, only to reach that same conclusion which was forced on Man from the beginning.

Faz emitted a sprinkling of electromagnetic tones, and spattered red the field lines.

And stirred itself to think again, each time the dim sun waned at the solstice. To remember and, still living, to rejoice. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE DREAMING MACHINE DREAMS OF THE FUTURE

All glass and metal,
plastics and liquid crystals.
It would traffic in lives
and cancellations, the routings
of the heart and the loins.
Fibers join each machine,
fibers join it to earth
and soft, fleshy things.
Not revolution,
but evolution, its thoughts
burning all flesh
into light.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KLEIN'S MACHINE

by Andrew Weiner

Andrew Weiner most recently appeared in *IAsfm* with "The Alien Station" (November 1984). Although, as a full-time freelance writer, he supports himself mainly through nonfiction sales, we hope he will continue to send us his slightly off-beat science fiction stories.

art: J. K. Potter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1.

They took him off the bus in Mt. Vernon, Ohio. His eyes were blank, and he had been sobbing quietly to himself for the past fifty miles. He was holding the crushed remains of a bright green flower in his left hand.

The driver turned him over to the ticket clerk, who called the local police. He was unresponsive to their questions. He had no identification, and no possessions except a one-way ticket to San Francisco and a crumpled $20 bill.

They threw the flower in the garbage and took him to the emergency ward of the local hospital.

"He's spaced out," one of the police officers told the intern. "Flying high."

Subsequent blood and urine analysis, however, showed no trace of drugs.

2.

"Could be a travel psychosis," said the senior psychiatrist. "Haven't seen one in years."

"Travel psychosis?" asked the intern.

"During the war," the psychiatrist said, "they would send soldiers cross-country by bus, transferring from base to base. Some of them would just disintegrate. The monotony got to them, you see. They had nowhere to look except inside. And they realized that they didn't know who they were. Of course, these were people who never had a very good grip in the first place."

He turned to the blank-eyed patient.

"Been travelling far, kid?"

The patient spoke for the first time.

"Oh yes," he said. "Very far."

3.

The patient was identified on the basis of his fingerprints. He had a minor criminal record in New York State, having been picked up several times at political demonstrations for disturbing the peace. He also had an active file at the FBI, documenting his involvement with several fringe leftist groups, although there were no recent entries.

The patient's name was Philip Herbert Klein. He was a resident of New York City. He had been reported missing three weeks before by his mother, Mrs. Alice Klein.

4.

Klein was transferred to a state mental hospital, and given anti-psychotic medication.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Within a few days he was able to converse normally, although he appeared fatigued and withdrawn. He claimed to have no memory of leaving New York City, nor of how he had come to be on a cross-country bus.

The duty psychiatrist modified the diagnosis from psychosis to hysterical reaction, dissociative type, and arranged for his immediate discharge.

"Amnesia," he told the patient's mother, when she came to take him home.

"Like on *Another World*?" she asked.

"Something like that," he said. "Although in this case he doesn't seem to have hit his head."

"But where has he been?" she asked. "Where has he been all this time?"

"Maybe it will come back to him," the duty psychiatrist said.

5.

On his return to New York City, Mrs. Klein, on the recommendation of the duty psychiatrist, arranged for a home visit by a psychiatric social worker.

While Klein sat on the couch watching a *Star Trek* rerun, Mrs. Klein explained the situation.

"He never did anything like this before," she told the social worker. "He was always a good boy. A little nervous, maybe. High strung. Perhaps a bit over-imaginative. But always such a good boy."

After taking a family history, the social worker asked to speak with Klein in private.

6.

Report of the psychiatric social worker
Philip Herbert Klein

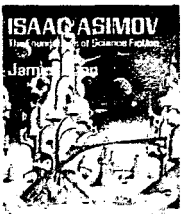
I interviewed the client on the morning of July 24th, three days after his return from Ohio. I also interviewed the client's mother, Mrs. Alice Klein.

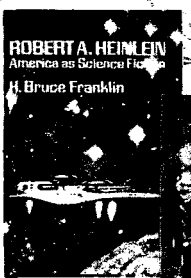
The client is 23 years old. He has never lived outside his family's home, and continues to reside with his widowed mother in a rent-controlled apartment on the Upper West Side. He has never held regular employment. He failed to complete his studies in accountancy at the City University, dropping out at the end of the first year. He told me that he had wished to study physics, but had been urged by his mother towards a more "practical" field.

Neither the client not his mother were forthcoming as to the circumstances surrounding him leaving university, although Mrs. Klein noted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Discover the Facts Behind the Fiction





Heinlein, Asimov, Stapledon, Wells—what made these great writers produce their astonishing works of fiction? What events in their own lives shaped their visions of the future? What cultural and scientific changes influenced them? And what do their sometimes bizarre tales really have to say?

Now you can gain a deeper appreciation of the work of your favorite authors with the **Science Fiction Writers** series. Find out:

- How a stormy adolescence set against the cataclysmic 1930s caused Isaac Asimov to embark on the *Foundation* series
- How a case of tuberculosis and an ad in *Thrilling Wonder Stories* launched Heinlein's writing career
- How Darwin influenced H.G. Wells
- How Olaf Stapledon's richly inventive but difficult fiction influenced Arthur Clarke, Poul Anderson, Kurt Vonnegut and many others.

Each volume in the **Science Fiction Writers** series treats an author of distinction. Together the volumes do full justice to science fiction as a pervasive force in western culture.

Special Offer!

To: Oxford University Press
Dept. ECAB, 200 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016

Please send me:

Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction by James Gunn
☐ cloth $18.95 ☐ paper $6.95

Robert Heinlein: America as Science Fiction by H. Bruce Franklin
☐ cloth $22.50 ☐ paper $4.95

The Science Fiction of H.G. Wells by Frank McConnell
☐ cloth $22.50 ☐ paper $4.95

Olaf Stapledon: A Man Divided by Leslie Fiedler
☐ $19.95 ☐ paper $7.95

Order 2 or more books and get 20% off list prices

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

I enclose my check/money order for $_____ *(Please add appropriate sales tax.)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on several occasions that her son was troubled at times by "nerves" and was "highly strung."

The family has never sought psychiatric assistance for the client, although he was treated briefly for enuresis by a pediatrician at the age of nine, soon after his father's death.

The client and his mother subsist on a modest income from the estate of the late Mr. Harry Kelin, a clothing manufacturer. The client is the only child. Mr. Klein was a refugee from eastern Europe, considerably older and rather less educated than his wife. Mrs. Klein recalls that her parents felt she had married "beneath" her, a verdict which she only superficially disclaims. Mrs. Klein came from a family with some pretensions to social standing, although little wealth after setbacks in the market.

At the time of their marriage, Mr. Klein was quite successful in his business, but later he suffered considerable reverses. This change in their fortunes, in some way a repetition of Mrs. Klein's own childhood experiences, coincided with the birth of their son. It seems that the client grew up in an atmosphere of some tension and economic insecurity, and that these conflicts between the parents were transmitted to him.

Philip himself claims to recall little about his father, who worked long hours and was rarely home. He does recall that Mr. Klein spoke with a marked accent, and had no knowledge of or interest in popular sports such as baseball, which caused him some embarrassment with his peer group. He "does not remember" how he felt when his father died, although his mother says that he "took it badly." As already noted, his enuresis first became severe at that time.

The mother, in any case, has apparently always been the dominant figure within this family constellation. Currently, she appears less concerned about her son's condition *per se* as with the fact that he was outside her surveillance and control for so lengthy a period.

Mrs. Klein suggested, in fact, that Philip might have been "kidnapped" and "brainwashed" by some radical group, although she was quite unable to suggest any motive for such an action. She has, apparently, warned her son repeatedly of the dangers of mixing with "bad company."

The boy (it is very difficult to think of him as a man) has little social life, and rarely leaves the apartment. For some period of time he was involved with peripheral socialist groups, but left following a disagreement he appears to have gone out of his way to engineer. He has no close friends of either sex, although he is a prolific letter-writer. He spends much of his time tinkering with fantastic and apparently useless machinery, styling himself an "inventor." (His mother recalls that in his teens he attempted to obtain a patent for a "space drive," an incident she found enormously comical.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His other great interest is reading popular fiction, specifically science fiction. His room is littered with paperbacks of this description. His interest in this literature goes back to early adolescence, and at one time he himself produced an amateur journal of criticism and discussion for circulation to similarly anomic and obsessive individuals.

"There is nothing like (these books)," he told me. "Nothing in the world."

The client has been diagnosed as suffering a classical dissociative reaction, of amnesia coupled with fugue state. On the occasion of the home visit, the client still claimed to be unable to recall any details of his experiences during his absence from home. He did, however, offer a hypothetical explanation of his disappearance, one so bizarre as to raise the question of a more severe pathology. The client told me that he believed that he had been "travelling in time." He attempted to substantiate this claim through reference to his personal journal.

I have referred the client for further psychiatric treatment on an outpatient basis.

7.

Excerpts from the journal of Philip Herbert Klein

February 7, 198-

Freezing cold today, arse-freezing cold, highest wind chill factor for the day in eleven years, got to be a screw-up in the sunspot cycle. Almost died of exposure getting over to Claude's place for the Progressive League meeting. Big argument with Ma before I left, why am I wasting my life hanging around with commie creeps, why am I doing this to her, and etc. You just can't win. Last year it was, get out of the house, find an interest, make new friends.

Lousy attendance at the meeting, not even the whole Central Committee. Claude is a lousy speaker, and "Capital Movements in West Africa" is not exactly a crowd-puller. I could have done without it myself. All his usual stuff about the Rockefellers and the Chase-Manhattan and the Trilateral Commission. No facts, just speculation. Claude has always been flipped-out on the Rockefellers. Always has to *personalize* everything.

"Come on," I said, when I couldn't take it anymore. "We have to be scientific, here. We're supposed to be *scientific* socialists, aren't we?"

"What do you know about science?" Claude asked.

"More than you," I said.

He didn't like that at all.

I've got to admit I'm getting sick of all these personality conflicts. How are we ever going to establish socialism in this country when we can't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even agree on when to take a coffee break? They say every personality conflict is really a political conflict, but I'm starting to wonder.

I haven't told anyone in the League about my project. I've got to have some concrete proof first. Otherwise, they're going to laugh in my face.

February 24th, 198-

Long letter from Sam Gold, replying to a letter of comment I wrote about an article on Heinlein which appeared in *Space Potatoes*. It's so long since I wrote the letter I can't even remember what I said, but I guess I was attacking Sam for attacking Heinlein's *Time Enough For Love*, which I still think is a great book. I guess Sam is on a literary kick these days.

Sam also asked if I was ever going to put out another issue of *Kleinlight*. The truth of it is, ever since Ma smashed my Gestetner, I've sort of lost the urge. Also, I really don't have the time anymore. Maybe that's what growing up is all about.

March 2nd, 198-

Leafletted with Penny outside the local supermarket, in support of the union local. It rained the whole time, I'm probably going to get pneumonia. I was almost glad when the union goons chased us away, although you'd think they would know who their friends are. I've had it up to here with leafletting, anyway. There's got to be a faster way to make a revolution.

Coffee with Penny afterwards; she was wearing a green blouse, looked very pretty. She told me I should go back to college, maybe study pol-sci. That's what she's doing at Columbia. I guess she thinks I just fritter away most of my time. I almost told her about my machine, but then I got worried about what she would think.

I thought about asking her to a movie, but I decided to go home and work on my project instead. There'll be more time later. All the time in the world.

March 7th 198-

The hamster didn't come back. I sat and watched the cage for two hours straight, and it didn't come back. Then I crashed out, and when I woke up it was past noon, and still no hamster. Now I have to figure out where it went.

March 10th, 198-

Another big blow-up with Ma. We're back on my reading habits of all things. The stuff I read is ruining my mind, driving me crazy, making me blind, and like that. She should know how crazy. I almost felt like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT STOP:
SPACE STATION

". . . I am directing NASA to develop a permanently manned Space Station, and to do it within a decade." . . . President Ronald Reagan, State of the Union message, January 25, 1984.

Are you a person of vision? Are you excited about this next new stepping stone in mankind's future? Did you know that there is a magazine that covers these developments better than any other? Did you know that there is a non-profit public interest organization, founded by famed space pioneer Dr. Wernher von Braun, that actively supports all aspects of a strong U.S. space program? That organization is the NATIONAL SPACE INSTITUTE. If you're a member, here's what you'll get:

- 12 big issues of Space World magazine. Tops in the field. Follow the political, social and technological aspects of all Space Station developments—and all other space exploration and development too!
- VIP package tours to Kennedy Space Center to watch a Space Shuttle launch—the thrill of a lifetime!
- Regional meetings and workshops—get to meet an astronaut!
- Exclusive Space Hotline and Dial-A-Shuttle services.
- Discounts on valuable space merchandise and books.
- and much, much more!

So if you are that person of vision, your eyes upon the future, excited about the adventure of space exploration, let us send you more information on how to join the NSI. Just fill in your name and address and our packet will be on its way. AND, we'll send you a FREE Space Shuttle Launch Schedule which is yours to keep whatever you decide to do!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, & Zip _____

NATIONAL SPACE INSTITUTE
West Wing Suite 203
600 Maryland Avenue, S W
Washington, D C 20024
(202) 484-1111

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walking out of the house and never coming back. But I'm too close to success now to have to worry about finding a place to live, and a job and all that stuff.

Why do I have to put up with this shit? I'm *twenty-three years old.*

March 18th, 198-

League meeting. Dick presented his paper on "Technology in a Socialist Society." Against capital-intensive energy resources, in favor of small, localized power units and an overall reduction in energy consumption. The usual hippy-dippy stuff.

What kind of future, I asked, are we going to have with less energy?

Nearly got kicked out on my ear.

Walking to the subway, Penny told me that my position in the League is insecure, and urged me to keep quiet for awhile. Apparently Claude is looking to start a schism. Wants to expel me and a few others who have crossed him. I'm not even sure that I care, although I'm glad that she seems to.

March 26th, 198-

The hamster is back. Also my wristwatch, which I strapped on its back. The watch appears to have stopped at the moment the field was induced. The hamster seems fine, though a bit sleepy. Have begun follow-up observations.

April 2nd, 198-

Well, I got expelled from the League. Deviationism. Big surprise. I guess I'm more relieved than anything else. In fact I should have quit first. I'm only sorry because I think I was starting to get close to Penny, and now she can't be seen consorting with a deviationist.

Of course, this changes everything concerning the project. I was almost ready to make my pitch, lay it all out for the League.

"We *can* change the future," I was going to tell them. "And fast."

Maybe I should have tried it anyway. Probably they would have dumped all over it, but I could have tried.

Maybe I'm not such a principled type after all. Maybe I wanted to keep all this to myself all along. But now I really do have to think things through, decide where I go from here.

April 3rd, 198-

Went out to pick up some magazines, and when I came back I found that Ma had poisoned the hamster. Said she couldn't stand the smell.

Thomas Alva Edison never had to put up with this shit!

Post-test follow-up incomplete. Should repeat the whole performance,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

make sure the hamster wouldn't have eventually dropped dead. But I'm not sure I can wait that long.

8.

"So you built a time machine," said the psychiatrist, whose name was Dr. Lawrence Segal.

"That's right," Klein said.

"Where is this machine?"

"In my apartment," Klein said. "But it doesn't work anymore."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," Klein said. "Maybe Ma tampered with it. Maybe something burned out. I can't make it work anymore."

"But it did work at least once?"

"Twice. Once for the hamster, and once for me."

"Tell me, Philip, what made you want to travel in time?"

"I don't know," Klein said. "It's something I thought about for years. I used to daydream about it, even back in high school. It came from reading all those stories about people travelling in time, into the future, into the past. People changing history. I used to wish I could do that too. Not change history, exactly. Just a few details here and there."

"What sort of details?"

"I don't know. It's like people always say, *if I could do it all again.* Go back before things went wrong and make them right. Things I said and wished I hadn't. Places I went to when I wanted to stay home, or go someplace else. Dumb, embarrassing scenes with girls. Like that. Go back and short-circuit all the pain.

"And then I started to thinking about bigger things. Like maybe going back to Dallas and saving Kennedy. I used to think that the world would have been a much better place if only Kennedy had lived.

"That was naive, of course. Saving Kennedy wouldn't really have changed anything. That was something I realized when I got into being a socialist. It would all have been the same. The same misery, the same wars, same everything. Only the names of the presidents would have been different.

"And then I thought about something my mother said. She used to point to this picture of Franklin Roosevelt, we always had a picture of him on the wall, and she would say, 'Without that man, there would have been a revolution in this country.' She thought that was great, of course, that old FDR stuck his finger in the dike. But I could see how Roosevelt had really been an obstacle to genuine social progress in this country.

"So that was my plan. To build a time machine, and get the League

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to knock off Roosevelt. And if that didn't help, we would try knocking off somebody else.

"I don't know if I was serious about all this. I don't know if I could actually bring myself to kill anyone, let alone FDR, who was always revered in my family as something approaching a goddam saint. And I never even tried to win over the League. So I don't know if I was ever really serious about all this political stuff. I think probably it was always personal, really.

"So in the end, I decided to go forward rather than back. To try and find a place for myself somewhere in the future. Because I wasn't happy here, that was for sure, and I don't think that even a revolution would have changed that much.

"I suppose my mother thought I was just beating off in there, all those months. But that was what I was doing. Building a time machine. And I did it. I really did it. I travelled in time."

"Except," Dr. Segal said, "that you don't remember a thing about it."

9.

With Philip Klein's consent, Dr. Segal scheduled a session using sodium pentathol in attempt to bring back his lost memory and lead him through and beyond whatever traumatic event or events might have precipitated his fugue.

"Philip," Dr. Segal said, once the drug had taken hold. "I want you to think back to the night of July 5th. Do you remember that night?"

"Of course," Philip said. "Tonight's the night. The night I test my machine."

"How do you feel?"

"Good," Philip said. "Excited. I can hardly wait. Should have done this months ago. I was nervous, I guess. And then I wanted to wait for July 4th. For the fireworks. I always did like the fireworks."

"Where are you, Philip?"

"I'm at home. In my room. I'm inducing the field."

"And then what?"

"I'm . . . travelling. Into the future."

"Tell me about it. Tell me about the future."

Klein appeared agitated. He shifted in his seat.

"What's happening, Philip?"

"I don't know. I don't remember . . ."

"Go with it, Philip. Don't fight it. You remember the future. You're there now. In the future now . . ."

"The walls are high . . .

"Yes?"

"Very high." And white, sheer white. Dazzling in the sun. The swollen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sun. I see no one, no one at all. The air . . . the air is hard to breathe. Thin. Harsh." Klein's breathing became labored. "There's something wrong with the air."

"Easy, Philip. Take it easy."

Klein's expression changed. He became alert, jerked his head back.

"I see something in the sky. Some kind of flying machine. It makes no noise, no noise at all. The shape is strange, I can't describe the shape. The machine is getting closer. The machine is firing at me. Firing some sort of ray . . ."

"And?"

"Now I'm inside the machine. The walls are smooth. Dark. There is no one else inside the flying machine. I can see out the window. We are flying above the city. The city of the future. Glass, concrete. Stripped, massed, streamlined. Overhead roads link the towers. The golden towers. But the city is empty."

"Empty?"

"There is no one, no sign of life."

"Then who guides the flying machine?"

"Machines guide the flying machine. Nothing but machines. I am taken to the Hall of the Central Computer. The Computer speaks to me. It tells me that the people have gone now, all gone away to other worlds circling other stars. But the people will return. They have promised that they will return."

"And then?"

"I move on. Onwards into the future. I travel on."

"And what do you see?"

"I see the sun explode. The wind burns my skin. My hair is matted with a fine ash. I move back. I watch the children swim in the decaying flower gardens. I stoop down to smell the sweet green flowers. I pick a flower, I hold it in my hand. . . . I move on, to visit the golden city. The buildings are crystal, so very high. And the people fly! Faces are yellow this year, this wonderful year." Tears welled up in his eyes. "The ice! I see and will remember the ice! And the fire. I will not forget the fire."

10.

"It was amazing the way it all came back," Klein told Dr. Segal at the next session. "All came flooding back. In no coherent order. No pattern. But the future. The actual future!"

Dr. Segal's expression was noncommittal.

"You think it's a delusion, don't you?" Klein asked. "A hallucination. From your perspective, that's all it could be. You think this is some private fantasy. Like the guy in *The Fifty-Minute Hour*. The one who thought he travelled in time and space."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dr. Segal raised his eyebrows.

"You've read Lindner?"

"Oh sure. And Freud, and Rogers, and Skinner. I liked Lindner's book. But you know, I couldn't help thinking. What if the guy was right?"

11.

Excerpt from the notebook of Dr. Lawrence Segal

I had asked Philip Klein to bring in a selection of his favorite science fiction books, and have now spent the better part of a weekend in reading them. Most of the authors were unknown to me, although I had heard of, if not actually read, Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Somehow I am always suspicious of a man who calls himself "Jr.," but it is hardly surprising that he should be so much better known than his contemporaries. He can, at least; manipulate the language.

Leaving aside the question of literary quality, I was both fascinated and repelled by these materials. This is, in many ways, a literature steeped in pathology, and there would surely be an article here if I could find the time.

Behind the veneer of reasoned "scientific" speculation, sometimes tiresomely detailed, more often as thin and perfunctory as the plot of some pornographic movie, one finds, almost inevitably, an enormous and overweening narcissism, luxuriating in the most joyously infantile fantasies of limitlessness and omnipotence.

Machines are everywhere in this literature. Phallic and magical machines, powered only by our most secret wishes and fears, penetrating the thin webs of space and time.

The most central and repetitious vision is one of escape, of mobility without limit, of a freedom never defined except by the absence of all civilized constraints. Characters rip themselves free of their proper place in the social and familial framework to achieve a personal transcendence.

It should go without saying that this is a profoundly oedipal literature, although typically these yearnings are at least somewhat masked. The parent or parent-figure is merely vilified, escaped, left behind.

But, almost an embarrassment of riches, there are actually stories in which we see a complete return of the repressed. The incest drive itself breaks surface, like some great white whale billowing water. Here a spaceman who travels to far stars and returns to make love to his own great-granddaughter. And there, yes, a time traveller who goes back to kill the hated father figure, to seduce his unsuspecting mother, even to become his own father.

Confronted even with such explicit material, Klein demonstrates absolutely no insight into his attachment to this literature.

"It's not a question of being for or against incest," he told me, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reference to one such story. "It's only a *speculation*. To provoke thought about the socio-cultural taboos surrounding the incest taboo."

"To provoke thought?" I said. "I see."

Klein places great importance on having his thoughts provoked. Contrary to the report of the psychiatric social worker, he is actually exceptionally well-read. He has been a voracious consumer of organized knowledge, has set himself upon a course of relentless self-education, seeking to understand intellectually a world in which he has always felt out of place. He has read physics, chemistry, biology, history, even psychology. On several occasions he has attempted to draw me into a discussion of Pepper's critique of psychoanalysis. Yet his reading has been without discrimination, mixing relativity theory and kaballah, Mendel and the mail-order wisdom of the Rosicrucians.

His idol is the English polymath and socialist H.G. Wells, perhaps best known as an early writer of these scientific romances. Klein, too, claims to be a "socialist," despite a profound aversion for his fellow man. But essentially his philosophy is one of self-improvement. Not only must man evolve as a species, but each one of us must evolve as a person. "There must be progress," he told me. "There must be."

Socially awkward, distanced from his peers, dominated always by his mother, Klein has set out deliberately to expand his mind the way that others might expand their muscle tissue, through exercise, training, and rigor. He has kept journals of his every waking thought, scraps of time and broken insights hoarded to chew over again and again, playing constantly with his own ideas, not so much stimulating his imagination as masturbating it.

He is, in fact, exactly the sort of alienated individual to whom this literature of science fiction would most powerfully appeal. Passive and detached, he seeks refuge from the storm of life in these Faustian fantasies of superiority, of an understanding which transcends normal understanding. In reality, of course, Klein is only dizzied and intoxicated by these restless, pointless dreams.

"What did you think the future would be like?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he said. "Different. I thought things would be different. Like California, maybe. Only better."

He rambled on, then, about a world in which abundance has replaced scarcity, automation has removed the need to work, love has replaced greed, where individuals live their lives only to create. No doubt all this came from his reading of these utopian tales of magic kingdoms at the end of the warp, where one floats in sweetness and light, where generations merge and smear themselves immortally across all space and time and even death itself is defeated.

And yet one must be careful not to accept these surface notions, these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

relatively simple and obvious yearnings of a desperately alienated individual, at face value. Far more real and urgent wishes, however unacknowledged, lay behind the construction of his supposed machine. His desire to travel foward in time, then, screens out his shameful and inexpressible wish to travel backwards in time and re-unite with his own narcissistic vision of the pre-Oedipal mother. He toys with various rationalizations that might justify this voyage back, but in the end is unable to sustain them, for they bring him too close to recognizing his real desires. His fantasy of saving Kennedy, for example, shields his repressed wish to kill Kennedy, kill the primal father. Later, disguised as a "scientific socialist" he actually permits himself partial expression of these aggressive impulses, in his extraordinary scheme for the assassination of Franklin Roosevelt. But this plan, too, is quickly repressed, discarded, thrown away.

It is a truism, of course, that time does not exist in the unconscious. We may travel back there, at will, back to infancy, back to our primal paradise of infantile omnipotence, of unlimited control and unqualified love. Klein's longing to return is not in itself unusual. Yet typically such wishes are displaced upon the social environment. The effort to recover lost infancy is channeled into the drive for economic or social transcendence, or else dissipated in nostalgic and romantic illusion. Klein, however, has become fixated on this matter of changing the very flow of time.

12.

"You picked a flower, Philip. Do you remember the flower?"

"It was green," Klein said. "Amazingly green. I held it in my hand."

"What happened to it?"

"I don't know," Klein said. "I don't know."

13.

"The machine, Philip. How is your machine?"

"It doesn't work, anymore."

"Where is it? Is it still in your apartment?"

"It's here."

"Where?"

"Here. I am the machine. The time machine. I am it."

14.

On the advice of his psychiatrist, Philip Klein moved out of his mother's apartment.

He got a furnished room, and supported himself through a job in a bookstore.

He began taking night school classes in Business Administration.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He read very little science fiction.

He began dating.

His therapy continued, but they no longer spoke of Klein's machine. They explored his childhood, and his current relationships with the world.

He was, according to Dr. Segal, developing good insight into himself and his world.

15.

The garbage from the Mt. Vernon bus station found its way, eventually, to the city dump.

Strange green flowers bloomed there briefly, then withered away, before being covered under new loads of garbage.

16.

"The Earth is all gone now, all gone away," Klein said. He was deep under the drug now, breathing very slowly. "And the Sun, the Sun is a long time gone. And yet the light is still bright, brighter than you could imagine: But soft, so it doesn't hurt my eyes. And I'm floating, floating inside the light. Floating on some fixed path. Moving through the space and the time. And now the light is pulsing. It's breaking down. There's darkness in between the light. And the lights are shrinking, moving away from me. Slowly. Very slowly. All going away now. All." ●

WE ARE THE NEW HEAT

for Baron

Conflagrant syllables sing light
Clavilux and Lumia: music, our sight
sound, our plexus, prism chords
of mutant flesh, bigger brains, better
words, whole souls sustained above
grey concrete's dirge and chokethroat rattle
pen's war dance and laser song:
How we heal, How we do battle

—Akua Lezli Hope

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO 4NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

art: Val Lakey Lindahn

THE BEAST FROM ONE-QUARTER FATHOM

by George Alec Effinger

The author shares his garret with six aquariums. Sometimes unusual creatures infiltrate these carefully controlled environments on the backs of more desirable fish or invertebrates. On one occasion, Mr. Effinger discovered something like the Creature X described in this story. He put a toy submarine into the tank; Creature X tore it to pieces. He put in a metal model of the Tri-Borough Bridge; Creature X ripped it apart. Mr. Effinger is now working on a detailed representation of the city of Tokyo, but he has no great hopes for it, either.

How they loved it when they saw Finster come into the store! He never paid any attention to the cute, furry animals that were placed cleverly near the cash register to tempt the kids and their moms: the gerbils, the baby ferrets, the Angora bunnies, the white mice twitching their pink noses, the hamsters. No, Finster walked right on by. He walked by the birds, too, the outrageously expensive macaws and the cheerful finches twittered in vain, as if they didn't deserve a crumb of his attention. The puppies—good grief, you'd think Finster's mother had been terrified by some puppy during her pregnancy, because he treated every dog, large or small, winsome or snarly, as if it had nothing on its obtuse canine mind but injuring Finster. One morning about a year ago, a little girl not more than eight years old shoved a baby beagle she'd fallen in love with into Finster's face; Finster had a powerful urge to slap down the puppy first and the little girl second, but he controlled himself. He just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoved the girl aside, knocking her into a tidily arranged pyramid of birdseed boxes. Kittens held no allure for Finster, either. Playful, big-eyed, mischievous kittens always grew up into cats, and Finster despised cats as much as he hated dogs. He smiled as he considered this thought; kittens didn't *always* turn into cats: not if you had the strength of your convictions.

No, when he burst his way into Critters R Us, he maintained his rather military bearing and unswerving, penetrating gaze as he stormed toward the rear of the shop, where the fish tanks were. Then, at last, Finster relaxed a little. His face even allowed itself something like a smile. Finster had no use for things with wings or fur or feet. Finster was a fish man, wholly and entirely a fish man. His family had always been fish people.

He'd gotten his first fish from his father. Finster was raising black mollies and swordtails in a ten-gallon freshwater tank while he was still in grade school. They reproduced profligately, and he was able to trade the bumper crops of infant mollies for packages of fish food. As it happened, just about everything Finster would ever learn about sex he learned from his tropical fish. He could tell that there were boy mollies and girl mollies; one kind chased the other kind; the second kind mostly didn't want to be bothered; and yet every once in a while the first kind would trap the second kind in a corner or against a decorative sunken treasure chest, and four weeks later there'd be three or four dozen new black mollies in the world. This conformed in a general way with much of what Finster overheard about sex from his young school friends. His adolescent fantasies often centered around trapping the incendiary Sandra Bartkus against a huge decorative sunken treasure chest.

The owner of Critters R Us, a tall, thin, anxious man named Les Moss, came around the counter to meet Finster. Moss talked to everyone as if they'd all been born hard of hearing. He zeroed in on Finster with a ravenous shopkeeper's sonar. Finster was a prize customer. Finster left lots of money in this particular store's cash register. "Looking for anything special today, Mr. Finster?" cried Moss.

Finster did not slow his pace or glance at Moss. "Maybe," he said thoughtfully. "I think just maybe."

"We got in a large shipment last night," shouted Moss, following slightly behind Finster like an eager little dog. "Some unusual tropicals, lovely fish, rare ones. They'd look marvelous with your—"

Finster had made his decision. He stopped suddenly, and Moss almost bumped into him. Finster turned with a look of determination on his face. "Mr. Moss," he announced, "I think it's time I tried setting up a saltwater tank."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moss almost fainted dead away. This sale was going to be big bucks. "Naturally," he said in his softest shout.

"People have told me for years that saltwater tanks are too much bother," said Finster. "You have to monitor the pH and the salinity and all of that, and the fish are expensive and delicate. My freshwater tanks are doing fine—I've cut the death rate almost in half in the last couple of months. Yet I feel the need of a new challenge. I think I'd like to take a stab at saltwater."

"No problem, no problem at all. It's not all *that* difficult. Once you get the tank set up, it practically runs itself. We have people—" Moss paused; he had been about to say "even stupider than you," but he caught himself—"people much less experienced than you who have beautiful setups that afford them hours of enjoyment and pleasure. I've seen people sit and watch their tanks all evening, for hours. Fish are peaceful. Fish are relaxing. Fish are—"

"These are the same idiots who stare at their radios, waiting for the video problems to clear up," said Finster acidly. Although he spent a lot of money in Moss's store, he didn't necessarily think that Moss himself was the final authority on submarine subjects. Whenever he thought of Moss, he pictured a fawning, obsequious salesman, always rubbing his hands together greedily like some caricature out of Dickens. Actually, Moss didn't rub his hands together, but he still managed to convey an unctuous and avaricious image. There were other things about Moss that Finster didn't like. For one, Moss himself took charge of feeding the large, ugly, brutish fish in the three tanks at the end of the left-hand row of freshwater fish. Feeding the fish was a menial job, and the other employees were each responsible for a section of tanks. Moss wouldn't permit anyone to feed the fish in the three end tanks, though. Finster didn't know what the fish were called—he didn't really want to know. There was only one fish in each tank, but it was big and mean. Moss fed them live goldfish. Moss tossed a wriggling goldfish into one of the tanks; it was gone, swallowed whole in an instant. Moss grinned and plopped another goldfish. Finster was disgusted by the obscene pleasure Moss took from it. Finster said something about the poor goldfish, about how unfair it was that some lucky goldfish end up in little round bowls as prizes at carnivals, and others end up gobbled down by their malignant cousins. And these big, hungry things didn't have the least bit of color or elegance about them.

"Don't start fretting about the goldfish," said Moss, flipping another one in a high arc into the second tank. Finster was sure that the famished black fish gulped it before the goldfish even broke the water's surface. "Some fish are meant to be eaten by other fish. You know about that,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that's the law of nature. It's a fact of life. The ocean is a jungle, Mr. Finster."

The ocean is a jungle, thought Finster. Now there was a brilliant observation if ever he heard one. Moss was probably a fascist, too, and didn't even know it. Finster understood all about the law of nature; what he objected to was Moss's repellent glee. It was as if Moss were sacrificing sanctified virgins or putting Marine recruits through basic training. They were jobs that had to be done, but you didn't have to revel in them. Finster himself had a reverence for life, just as Albert Schweitzer had had a reverence for life. Finster felt he shared several noble qualities with Albert Schweitzer. They both liked Bach, for example.

And Finster was beginning to suspect that Moss didn't have so much knowledge about the care of fish as he pretended. The last time Finster consulted him about sick fish—the freshwater fish were *always* getting sick, by ones and twos or by the whole tankful in a general plague—Moss advised him in such a patently absurd way that Finster was certain for the first time that the shopowner was bluffing.

"My two sunset gouramis just hang in one place and rock back and forth," Finster had said worriedly.

"Any white spots on them? Clamped fins? Signs of fin or tail rot, or patches of missing scales? Anything like that?" asked Moss.

"No, I checked for everything I could think of. They look perfectly healthy, except they just hang there, rocking back and forth."

"Ah," said Moss, a wise expression creeping slowly across his face, "it must be Gourami Rocking Disease."

"Never heard of that one."

"It has some long Latin name," said Moss, shrugging. "I don't know all that technical stuff, I'm a self-made man. Experience and careful observation have taught me all I know." Moss tapped his shrewd old skull a few times. "Gourami Rocking Disease, that's what it sounds like to me." That was a nice touch, admitting that he didn't know absolutely everything. It almost persuaded Finster that Moss wasn't faking from the getgo.

"Gourami Rocking Disease," said Finster slowly. "What do I do for it?" Moss stocked a whole aisle full of medicines, tonics, and water treatments, and surely one of them would save Finster's ailing gouramis.

"I just don't know," said Moss, shaking his head sadly. "It still baffles the experts. Try dumping in some of this stuff for parasites. Let me know if it works." Gourami Rocking Disease. It reminded Finster of the rocker panel cotter pins the older guys had told him to fetch back in auto shop in high school; they laughed at him over that one for weeks. Anyway, he bought the medicine. "Try this," said Moss, "and if they don't get better, maybe you should move them to a drier climate. Like Arizona."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The medicine stopped their rocking in less than a day, however. Both gouramis—along with two cardinal tetras, a rasbora, and Finster's pet upside-down catfish—sank to the bottom of the tank, never stirred again, and quickly turned all white and fuzzy. *Muerto*, folks. Finster had had to change half the water in that tank to be sure none of the other fish would suffer the same fate.

After that incident, Finster hated Moss's guts and was suspicious of his word on anything that had to do with tropical fish. Nevertheless, Moss's shop was the most complete and most convenient in town. A couple of the other employees were also hobbyists and sometimes gave Finster genuine help, if Finster could get to them before Moss cut in with his phony smile and his clangorous greeting.

Once Finster made the decision to buy a saltwater tank, his life turned onto an unalterable course. He could not know this, naturally; yet for the brief remainder of his life, he would refer to this time as Finster's Herculean Labors. Finster was like that; he was kind of a jerk, if you want to know the truth, pretty much the same sort of jerk that Moss was.

The First Labor, thought Finster, was getting past Moss and out of the store with what he needed. "I guess when it's all set up," he said, "it will be more interesting and colorful than the freshwater tanks."

"Look around you," said Moss proudly. The marine tanks were filled with spectacular specimens: bright flags of blue; swift, startling scraps of yellow; splashes of every hue imaginable. Even the creatures that just sat there—the sea anemones, for example—came in flaming red or luminous green. The freshwater fish and plants seemed drab by comparison. The variety and beauty of the saltwater creatures captivated Finster. How would he ever be able to choose among them? He wanted them all. How sad to be limited to just a few, as if he'd walked into a secret cave massed with uncountable tons of treasure, gold and jewels, and he was able to steal away with but one poor pocketful.

"So buy a bigger tank," suggested Moss.

Finster had never owned anything but ten-gallon tanks, but the saltwater fish demanded more room to show off their individual glories. He looked around at the display tanks. Some of them were immense. There were twenty-nine-gallon and thirty-gallon tanks, varying slightly in their dimensions. Finster saw tanks of fifty, sixty, ninety—there was even one display tank setup of two hundred twenty gallons. A human family of four could have lived in that tank, except for all the water. Finster imagined them with their noses lifted up like turtles, desperately raised into the air space between the bubbles and the tank's lid. He shook his head grimly; so many people led wretched lives all around the world, yet here large, showy butterfly and triggerfishes were dining daintily in a costly imitation of a coral reef. There were moral dilemmas every-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where, you couldn't avoid them. "Yes," said Finster, "I'll go with the twenty-nine-gallon."

"A truly excellent choice. Not too large, not too small," said Moss. He was being obsequious again. "You'll need a stand, too. We have these nice black iron stands or these handsome handcrafted wooden ones."

"I have a stand left over at home," said Finster. "I moved my second ten-gallon tank into the bedroom, on the dresser. I use it as a nursery now for the baby mollies and swordtails. I can use the old stand."

Moss gave a tart laugh. "Do you have any idea how much twenty-nine gallons of water *weighs*?" he asked. "*Do* you? I'd *like* to see you put the big tank on your old ten-gallon stand and fill it up. *That* would be a laugh. You'd end up ankle-deep in saltwater in your living room. That would serve you just right, wouldn't it? Trying to save a buck here and a buck there. Look, Mr. Finster, take my advice: either you go about this the right way, or you just forget it. That's what I tell *all* my customers. I couldn't care less about the sales, the money means nothing to me. I just want to make sure all my fishes find good, caring, happy homes. *God-fearing* homes. Fish have rights, too, you know. I'm sorry if this causes you a moment of painful self-evaluation, but you ought to have considered it before you came in here."

Finster was chastened. "You're right about all of that," he said glumly. He bought an appropriate iron stand. Then he let Moss choose for him a hinged cover with a flurorescent light, an undergravel filter, a good pump, tubing and valves, boxes of Minute Sea salt, and a hydrometer. Finster voiced no further objections. Moss gave a quick look around to see if he'd left anything out, and decided that he hadn't. "This should start you out just fine, Mr. Finster. Pick out your gravel over there. Let me know if you have any problems." He turned to one of his employees. "Debbie," he said, "ring up all this stuff for Mr. Finster, will you?" Then, with the thrill of the chase at an end, Moss began to stalk a couple of new customers who'd just come into his store.

"Will this be all?" asked Debbie.

"No," said Finster, "I'd like to get a few fish, too." Finster pointed out a modest selection and Debbie netted them out of their display tanks. She filled plastic bags with tank water, plopped one creature in each bag, and twist-tied it closed.

"They'll be all right like this for hours," she said.

"Great," said Finster. He selected a few bags of pale pink gravel and carried them to the counter. He also bought a can of flake food for the fish and a special preparation for the invertebrates. Then he looked at his beautiful new acquisitions. He'd settled on a pink-tipped Haitian sea anemone; a red-and-white banded coral shrimp; a jet black fish with three white spots, called a domino damsel (Finster immediately named

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the domino "Fats"); a brilliant blue damsel; a pair of bright orange and white clownfish; and a "live rock," which was just a hunk of rock from some seabed encrusted with many different creatures: tiny anemones, tiny featherduster tubeworms, minute copepods and bristleworms that would seed the tank and provide variety in the diet of the larger animals.

The total of his purchases, after he threw in a guidebook to marine invertebrates and another book on saltwater fish, came to nearly four hundred dollars. Finster trembled just a little as he wrote out the check. It was a lot of money to spend at one time on a hobby, some items of which were by nature perishable. Yet he felt a swelling elation as he and another employee carried the equipment and the bags of living things to his car.

Finster's Second Labor: He chose a place in the living room for the stand, across from the couch, where most people would have had a television. He carefully rested the tank on top. He laid the filter on the bottom, covered it with gravel, and connected it with the tubing and valves to the pump. Then he put the hinged cover on the tank and plugged both it and the pump into the nearest wall socket. The pump was forcing air bubbles to stream out of the tubes in the back corners. "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep," said Finster, smiling. He switched on the fluorescent lamp. "Let there be light!"

He filled three five-gallon buckets with tap water and lugged them into the living room. Then he read the directions on the box of Minute Sea. The box pictured a Melvillian seafaring man, patch over one eye and harpoon in one hand. What was this ancient mariner planning to do? Harpoon a crummy little three-inch clownfish? Finster was easily irked by commercial art.

Combined with ordinary tap water, the Minute Sea became a chemical solution almost identical to seawater, and even healthier for both fish and invertebrates. Finster measured out portions and dumped them into the buckets. He raised the hinged cover; then he lifted a heavy bucket and poured the saltwater into the tank. He emptied the other two buckets and repeated the operation, until the tank was filled almost to the top. "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place," he murmured. He tested the salinity with the hydrometer and was satisfied that it fell in the proper range. He checked the temperature: perfect.

He was all set to let his new roommates into their new home. He let a little tank water into their bags every few minutes until they'd acclimated to the tank's conditions; then he set them all free. "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures," he said, and he placed the live rock in a decorative position near the back.

Almost immediately, a little hermit crab emerged from the rock, fol-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lowed by a sandy brown creature that Finster couldn't identify. It was about the size of a child's hand. Finster looked forward to tracking it down in the reference book. He wanted to know absolutely everything about his creatures: what they liked to eat, how they reproduced, how he could tell if they were happy.

Finster stepped back from the tank and sat on the couch. He watched the brightly colored creatures darting around their little world. The clownfish and the damsels swam curiously back and forth. The coral shrimp floated gently to the bottom and began poking along on the gravel for bits of food. The anemone tumbled foolishly until it hit bottom upside-down, and stood there for a while on its tentacles, its cream-colored foot wavering uselessly in the gentle current. The hermit crab and the unknown thing crawled along, taking the measure of their new environment. "Behold," Finster whispered, "it was very good." He watched them for a long time.

The next morning, after Finster turned on the freshwater tanks' lights and fed the fish, he hurried excitedly to the new tank. The sight that awaited him made him shiver. The anemone had withdrawn its tentacles and fallen over on its side; it looked like it had turned itself inside-out. Finster opened the cover and prodded the animal; it did not respond. The coral shrimp lay on its side, also, and just floated away inertly when Finster touched it. The blue damsel hung head down, obviously dead, in a back corner. The domino drifted sideways on the surface with the bubbling water. One clownfish was dead, stuck between the filter tube and the tank glass; the other clownfish rested on the gravel, breathing with difficulty and jerking spasmodically, only minutes from death. The hermit crab was dead, too, and the live rock was no longer live. The unidentified brown invertebrate was still alive, but its color had changed to a dark chocolate and it was curled up in a tight spiral.

Finster stared at the tank with a mixture of sadness, anger, and helplessness: He hadn't had the animals long, but he had already become fond of them. He knew that he had done something wrong. He knew that he had killed them.

Moss wasn't in the store when Finster arrived, so he went to Debbie, the attractive and knowledgeable assistant manager. He told her what had happened. "That was nearly a hundred dollars' worth of fish I just flushed down the toilet," he said.

Debbie looked at him for a moment and blinked. "You were just setting up that tank yesterday?"

"Of course."

"I thought you already had another saltwater tank. If I'd known you were just setting it up, I wouldn't have sold you the fish."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What did I do wrong?" said Finster, sighing. She made him review the whole process, step by step.

"Chloramines," she said at last. "You didn't dechlorinate the water."

Finster was outraged. "I know enough to dechlorinate water," he cried. "I assumed that Minute Sea stuff had a dechlorinator in it."

Debbie shook her head. "There are several brands of salt, and none of them has a dechlorinator. Now listen. If it was just chlorine, it would evaporate in a few days by itself; but the city uses chloramines, and they'll stay in the water forever unless you add some of this." She handed him a plastic bottle. "The directions are the same for fresh and saltwater tanks."

Finster nodded dejectedly. The want of a tiny quantity of sodium thiosulfate had cost him dearly. "The only thing that didn't die was some kind of invertebrate that came with the live rock. I couldn't find a picture of anything like it in my book."

Debbie squinted at him a little. "What's it look like?"

"About yea big, brown, with four legs or tentacles reaching forward. It's got some kind of cartilaginous hump with a deep cleft in it. There are a lot of pairs of legs on each side, and it rounds off in back to a bulgy, shapeless sac. This morning it was all twisted up on the bottom."

Debbie grimaced. "Sounds ugly."

Finster felt suddenly defensive. "Well, *I* like him. Do you know what it is?"

She shook her head. She looked at two of her co-workers. "Max?"

Max shrugged. "Sounds ugly to me, too."

"Curled up in a spiral?" asked Rudy, the other employee. Finster nodded. "It's a sea pen."

"Oh," said Finster. He'd read all about sea pens when he got home.

Finster's Third Labor: A few days later, confident of the absence now of chloramines in the tank water, Finster spent fifty dollars for fish and invertebrates, different ones than the first time. The next morning, they, too, were dead, all but the brown tentacled thing. Finster didn't know what it was, but it absolutely was *not* a sea pen. Sea pens are a kind of soft coral, related to the anemones. The mystery animal's legs and cartilage put it higher in the animal kingdom.

Finster returned to the store. "Your pH is much too low," Debbie told him. He learned that he had the wrong kind of gravel; he bought bags of crushed oyster shell to keep the water slightly alkaline. Taking out all the pink gravel and replacing it with the crushed shell would be a long, tedious, boring job.

"By the way," he said, "it wasn't a sea pen."

Rudy turned up his hands; was he expected to know every lousy invertebrate that swimmeth or creepeth?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max called Moss out of his office. "Les," said Max, "do you know what this is?" Finster made a quick sketch of the thing.

"How big?" asked Moss. Finster showed him. "It's a sea hare. Very definitely."

"Oh," said Finster.

Finster's Fourth Labor: He wasn't about to spend another fifty dollars on fish until he was certain it was safe. He spent two dollars and thirty cents on a small white Florida anemone, and four fifty for a common black-and-white striped damsel. "It's a shame you can't spend more today, Mr. Finster," said Moss, with a wide smile that almost seemed to ooze oil from the ends. "Special sale, all this week. Prices slashed. Everything must go, to the bare walls. There'll never be a sale like this again. We're wheeling and dealing. If you can find anyone who can beat our—"

"That will be six eighty and tax, out of ten," said Finster, handing the money to Debbie. Moss's expression changed so quickly it looked like a bad splice in a home movie. He spun on his heel and stalked away, offended, bored, or possibly just out of habit. "It's not a sea hare, either," Finster called after him. Moss paid no attention.

"No?" said Debbie. She was getting very curious herself.

"Sea hares are molluscs, and this thing looks like some kind of arthropod to me. The legs, I mean."

Debbie took a pink comb out of her hair, brushed her hair back, and replaced the comb. "Yeah, but," she said. "There are some fish that walk around on the bottom with 'legs.' They're actually just the first few spines of their ventral fins, modified by evolution."

"I've looked through every book in the library."

Debbie brightened. "I know somebody at school who set up an exhibit at the Toth Aquarium. You'd like him. He likes to sit around all day and all night classifying dead specimens. He specializes in marine invertebrates. I'll give him a call."

"Terrific," said Finster, and he took his puny little fish and his puny little anemone and went home.

Finster's Fourth Labor: The anemone and the damselfish did not die. Not immediately. Well, after a week, the brown invertebrate caught hold of the damsel somehow and was shoving it somewhere between its tentacles, toward a wide horizontal opening at the front of the cleft. There were pale structures in the opening—too small for Finster to see clearly—bristles, smaller tentacles, teeth? It took the animal about five minutes to swallow the small fish. Finster realized that he had his first piece of real information: the brown thing was carnivorous. He got a notebook and turned to a blank page, where he wrote OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE BEHAVIOR OF CREATURE X, FOR THE PURPOSES OF MAKING A TENTATIVE IDENTIFICATION. He under-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lined that, skipped a space, then wrote Carnivorous. On the next line he wrote Brown. Then it occurred to him that perhaps, just perhaps, he had in his own tank an animal completely unknown to science. He may have discovered an entirely new species. . . .

Enigmatis finsteri.

He liked that so much, he didn't even mind losing the damsel. He'd keep Creature X well-fed with shrimp from his freezer; then it probably wouldn't attack the other residents of the tank. And there were going to be lots more, now that he was rather certain the water was at last conditioned. He celebrated by buying a royal gramma, a neon goby, two more clownfish and a yellow carpet anemone for them to hide in, another coral shrimp, a purple sea urchin, three six-inch featherduster tubeworms, a graceful sailfin tang, a red pistol shrimp that burrowed beneath the decorative rocks, two three-striped damsels, a bright red flame scallop, a little brown starfish, a sea slug, a pearl-scale butterflyfish, and a mandarin that shimmered in swirls of red, blue, and green.

Debbie's friend, Fred the marine biologist, came by several days later to inspect Creature X. Fred was a tall, gaunt young man with very short red hair and a bushy red beard. He stood in the hallway uncomfortably until Finster remembered to invite him in. Fred was impressed by the tank. "That's some collection you have there," he said.

"Thank you," said Finster. "I like to think so. All those fish, all those friendly colors zipping around, I try to grasp their wholeness as a community, if you know what I mean. But they won't hold still long enough."

"What I mean, Mr. Finster," said Fred, coughing apologetically into his fist, "is that in a tank this size, you have a certain amount of bacteria in the substrate that breaks down the waste products from the fish and the invertebrates. If you have too many fish, the bacteria can't keep up, and you start building up dangerous levels of ammonia. If you're overfeeding them, the extra food just adds to the problem. You could lose that whole population almost overnight."

Finster's face paled. "What should I do?" he asked.

"You can test for ammonia. If the level's too high, you replace the water. You know what a bitch that is. The general rule is one inch of fish or less for every gallon."

Finster's pale face reddened. "That's only twenty-nine inches of fish! You're asking me to get rid of almost everything in there!"

Fred shrugged. "Okay, maybe the two clownfish and a couple of small damsels or gobies, maybe the tang until it grows too big. It's your tank, Mr. Finster, but it's *their* funeral."

Finster swallowed hard. "So what do you think of Creature X?"

Fred gave an amused little laugh. "Can't tell you, Mr. Finster. I've

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never seen anything like that before. It doesn't exist, there's no such thing."

"But look at it! It's—"

"It's just caught your neon goby. See the way the goby's sort of stuck to that tentacle? I'll bet your creature has stinging cells, like an anemone. Nematocysts. It paralyzes the prey, then draws it to its mouth. Look, that's just what it's doing."

"Well, what *is* it?"

Fred shrugged again. "I can't tell you a damn thing, Mr. Finster. It has a gut like a coelenterate, tentacles like an anemone, legs like a crab, skin like an echinoderm, a proto-skeleton, and probably dual Holley carbs, four on the floor, mag wheels, and fuzzy dice hanging from its rear-view mirror. It's some nifty little predator, Mr. Finster. I'd actually like to study it. I'd like that a lot."

"You mean, take it with you?" Finster was horrified by the very thought. He saw his name disappearing from the article in *Scientific American*, replaced by the name of this Fred guy.

"Not really. I study these animals all day, I don't want to see them at home. I won't have anything in my house that needs to be fed or cleaned up after. I wouldn't want to keep it at the university, either. The undergraduates are always confusing nitrates and nitrites or dosing sick fish with quadruple the right amount of copper sulfate, thinking it will make them better faster. Maybe you'd allow me to drop around to observe your little discovery now and then."

"Certainly," said Finster, greatly relieved. He thought that he might not mind sharing credit, if Fred actually wrote the paper.

The last thing Fred said as he left was, "I'd try to take back some of those fish, see if the store will give you a credit slip."

"I will," said Finster, "first thing Monday." Two fish had already died by that evening, before Finster even went to bed. More died Saturday, still more on Sunday, and on Monday morning there were only six living things in the tank: three featherdusters, the starfish, one of the three-striped damsels, and Creature X, which was just finishing off a breakfast of the other striped damsel.

"You know," Debbie remarked later, "the only thing that's come through all these disasters of yours has been that strange invertebrate."

"*Enigmatis finsteri*. It survived the chloramines, it survived the low pH, and now it's surviving the ammonia build-up." Finster sighed. He had a sort of paternal pride in the thing. When he got home, everything else in the tank was dead, except Creature X. Two hundred dollars' worth of fish and invertebrates. Plus tax.

Finster's Fifth Labor: Now time passes . . . days go by . . . weeks go by . . . two, three, four months go by. You can see the pages of the cal-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

endar tearing off, tumbling down in quick succession, superimposed over the twenty-nine gallon tank. Finster had learned much the hard way, yet he still had a few things left to discover. He kept the population in the tank under control; he monitored the water quality; and soon, as Moss had predicted, the tank stabilized. Everything was fine in Finster's saltwater world, as it was in Finster's freshwater world. He had jotted many notes on Creature X, but neither Fred nor anyone else had been able to classify the animal. Well, Creature X wasn't going anywhere—that was very apparent. Creature X was the healthiest, most robust animal in any of Finster's tanks. Indeed, Finster had to spend more time and money satisfying its appetite than he did for all the other saltwater animals combined. Finster could study it at his leisure.

During these last idyllic months, Finster learned quite a lot about Creature X. He watched it crawl along the bottom in search of prey, but he discovered that it could climb the glass, as well. With its four long specialized legs or tentacles, it could grab unwitting fish swimming too near. Its brown color changed: when the light was off, it became a dark shadow on the tank's bottom. In the morning, when Finster clicked on the fluorescent light, Creature X gradually assumed a mottled sandy color. Creature X grew considerably during these weeks, until it was nearly ten inches long. Finster considered getting it a separate tank; it was too large and too voracious to keep with the peaceful, defenseless fish he had collected.

There had been no more disasters, though it had been a near thing. Debbie warned him just in time to prevent Finster from buying a beautiful but perpetually hungry variety of triggerfish. It looked like a thing a Cubist might have painted, with its oddly placed eyes and mouth and its colorful, angular markings. It was a Humu-Humu-Nuku-Nuku-A-Puaa, but everybody just called it a Picasso trigger. "It looks great now," said Debbie, "but when it gets a little bigger, it'll eat everything in your tank. You'll end up with the Picasso at one end of the tank and Creature X at the other, staring each other down."

"Might be an interesting matchup," suggested Moss. Finster gave him a quick, disdainful look. As Finster turned away to choose another fish, he heard Moss say to Debbie, "Don't tell customers things like that. Just sell the fish." Finster knew Debbie would ignore the order; she had too much integrity. She seemed to be the only person in the shop who knew her caudal fin from a hole in the ground. Finster had fantasies of inviting her home to see Creature X for herself. He assumed, however, that because she was so lovely, she had schools of other boyfriends. She might laugh airily in his face at his invitation.

Later she saved him from making a second bad selection. "Here's another general rule," she told him. "If you have a cheap fish bigger than

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an expensive fish, the cheap fish will eat the expensive fish. If you have a cheap fish and an expensive fish of the same size, the cheap fish will again eat the expensive fish. If the expensive fish is bigger, it may eat the cheap fish, but it will probably die the next day. This raggedy brown sargassum costs about eight bucks, but it'll take your honey of a fifty-dollar flame angel to the mat in about four minutes. This three-dollar arrow crab is neat to look at, but it'll sneak up on your forty-dollar Indian fire shrimp and there won't be enough left of the shrimp to float to the surface."

"Don't tell him that!" said Moss. Since Finster's saltwater fish had stopped dying so dependably, Moss had seen his weekly sales total drop alarmingly. He was getting desperate. Both Debbie and Finster turned to look at him, but neither said anything. Finster believed that Moss was not a well man.

Finster bought neither the sargassum nor the arrow crab. As a matter of fact, Finster never bought another fish again. When he returned home, he served supper to his tanked-up friends. It took a while, but at last he realized that Creature X was missing. It couldn't have been hiding; there wasn't anywhere for such a big animal to hide. Now this was a real puzzle. The only explanation that seemed likely was that nature had taken its course. None of the fish or invertebrates stood a chance against Creature X one-on-one, but possibly they had ganged up on it in self-defense. It was a grievous blow. The steady march of science had been given a serious setback.

Finster was right. Nature *had* taken its course. Finster was wrong. Creature X was not dead.

Finster's Sixth Labor: Now, of course, a purist might complain that Finster was a trifle presumptuous to compare his hobbyist's tribulations to those of Hercules. After all, Hercules had to face twelve of them, and Finster only six. The important point to remember is that Hercules survived his Labors, while Finster did not. It is further cogent to remark that Hercules was the son of Zeus, and therefore half-immortal. Finster was as certain as one can be about these things that no divinity of any sort had been involved in his own lineage for at least four generations.

It was a beautiful morning in the middle of October. It was the time of year when Finster always began to feel just a little melancholy, in a gratifying way. Nostalgia seemed to rule him. He rose from his bed thinking of his youth, his drear and vanished youth. He sighed heavily as he opened the medicine cabinet to get his razor. He noticed nothing unusual at first, reaching automatically for the instrument and turning his head rather slowly to look. His hand stopped frozen in mid-air. Just above the second shelf, between a twelve-year-old prescription bottle and the English Leather, curled into a tight coffee-colored spiral, was Crea-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ture X. Finster was stunned for a few seconds; it had been weeks since he'd even thought about Creature X. He looked closer: no, it wasn't Creature X, after all. It was a miniature version of Creature X, smaller than a bar of soap. It was a newborn or hatchling.

Hypotheses raced through his mind. How could this small marine invertebrate be in Finster's bathroom? How could it be alive out of the saltwater? What had happened to its parent?

The answer to the last question Finster never learned. He guessed, however, that Creature X had climbed the tank's glass and forced the lid open. It had certainly been large and powerful enough to do that. Then, like certain amphibians, it had left Finster's miniature sea to procreate on dry land. Perhaps, having passed on its heritage of genetic information, Creature X perished immediately. Or else, Finster thought uncomfortably, it was still alive in the apartment. Somewhere. He wasn't crazy about the thought of stepping on it barefoot in the dark some night.

Finster got a fine mesh net from his aquarium supplies and scraped the stubborn young X off the wall of the medicine cabinet. The ugly thing began to uncurl, and Finster hurried with it into his living room. He opened the lid of the saltwater tank and dumped the X in. It sank quickly to the bottom, twitched a few times, and died. Finster had made another vital observation: only the older X was able to survive in the saltwater. He felt a pang of sorrow over killing, however accidentally, this infant X. It might have been fascinating to watch it develop. He made an entry of the event in his notebook, and then went back to the bathroom to shave.

That night, after dining alone in his favorite Italian restaurant, Finster returned home to find two more young Xs, one part way up the refrigerator and the other attached to a leg of the dresser in the bedroom. He was at a loss to know what to do. He tried another experiment, plopping one of them into a tank of freshwater. The result was the same; the X drowned. Finster flushed it down the toilet, then put the second X in a small goldfish bowl that had been long unused. As a precaution, he put a square of glass over the bowl. He was fortunate that, after all, he did have one young X to study.

The next morning was not so pleasant. It was murky and drizzling, and the first hint of winter was in the low, grim sky. Finster received an immediate shock: he saw three young Xs in the bedroom, and another in the hall. In the bathroom there were four more. He walked around his apartment taking inventory. The total came to twenty-eight. That was too many. The creatures had stepped over that fine line between scientific puzzle and common nuisance. Finster decided to call his pest control man and see what he might suggest. The X in the golfish bowl was all he needed or wanted. Perhaps Moss would buy some of the others;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it was worth asking. He finished dressing and had all twenty-eight scooped up and bagged in a few minutes. He drove to the pet shop. It was Debbie's day off, so unfortunately he had to deal with Moss himself. Moss was not in a spending mood. Finster let the baby Xs loose on the pavement outside Critters R Us. "Run," he urged them, "be free. You are responsible now for your own salvation. The world promises nothing more to any of us."

The following morning came after a night of troubled dreams. He woke to the pins-and-needles sensation you get when you've slept with an arm trapped under your body. "I'm going to hate this in a minute," Finster said to himself. He tried to flex the tingling arm, but he couldn't. He tried to roll over. He couldn't; both legs were tingling to the hip. He tried to reach over with the other hand and physically pull his sleeping arm free, but he couldn't. All four limbs were paralyzed.

He could raise his head a little. When he realized what he was watching, he knew he had made a tremendous scientific discovery. He would become famous for this. His body was almost blanketed by young Creature Xs, clinging to his legs and arms or crawling toward his chest. That explained the tingling, he thought. They had stung him with . . . he groped for Fred's word . . . with their nematocysts. There were so many of them that their cumulative poison had rendered him almost helpless. Well, he thought, I've got to do something about this. He exerted all his strength in an effort to roll over and out of bed. He moved nowhere. He wrenched his neck painfully, but otherwise there was no result at all.

"I think they've got you," came a voice from the foot of the bed.

Finster's mind was beginning to spin. He felt dreamy and numb. He tried to focus on the unknown speaker. It seemed to be an old man, dressed in a flowing white garment. Finster wondered how the man kept it on; it just seemed to loop here and wrap there. It was none of Finster's business. The old man wore a golden laurel wreath on his brow. He smiled gently at Finster. "Who . . . who are you?" Finster asked in a croaking voice.

"I am—"

"I know. I know who you are. You're Linnaeus. I remember seeing your picture. You're Carl von Linné, the Father of Taxonomy."

Linnaeus (1707–1778) smiled again, but said nothing.

"You've always been one of my heroes," murmured Finster. "You devised the modern system of classifying animals and plants."

"Yes, one of the most tedious, boring, dull, and exacting sciences in the world. There are many who know my name, but few who do me so much honor."

"I want to learn everything I can about taxonomy. If only I knew more. I hoped the discovery of *Enigmatis finsteri* would bring me money and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the time to study. I could open my own aquarium and pet shop; I have a name all picked out: Beastworld. If I had—"

"Peace, sir," said Linnaeus. "I have come to offer you everything you could hope for. I have come to take you with me."

"Take me? Where?" asked Finster. He felt no fear at all, conversing with this specter. Finster's mind was whirling and his eyelids began to droop. One of the hungry Xs was stretching toward his throat.

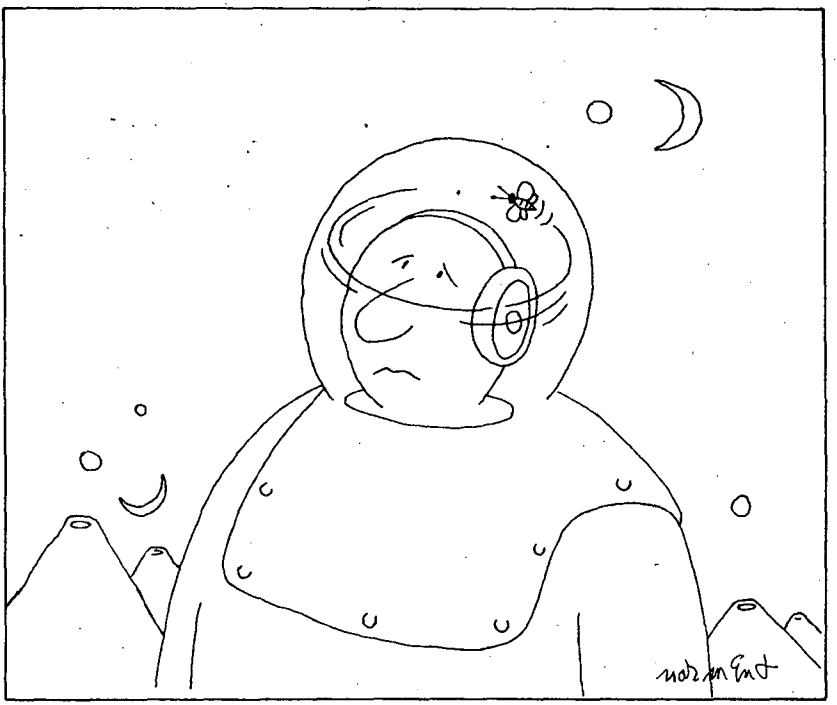
"Where you'll have nothing to do all day but make endless lists of insect species, and sort immense collections of identical shells, and tally infinite columns of figures, and take an eternity of redundant measurements of spiders and thistles and lapwings and euglena and all manner of dead living things."

"Why," whispered Finster, "it sounds like Heaven."

Linnaeus, the great Swedish scientist, held forth his hand. "And so it is, Butchie."

Butchie, thought Finster, no one's called me that . . .

His dream, spun out of the invertebrates' toxin, faded. The creature on Finster's throat found the carotid artery and, after a little effort, began to drink. ●



© 1985 by John Norment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

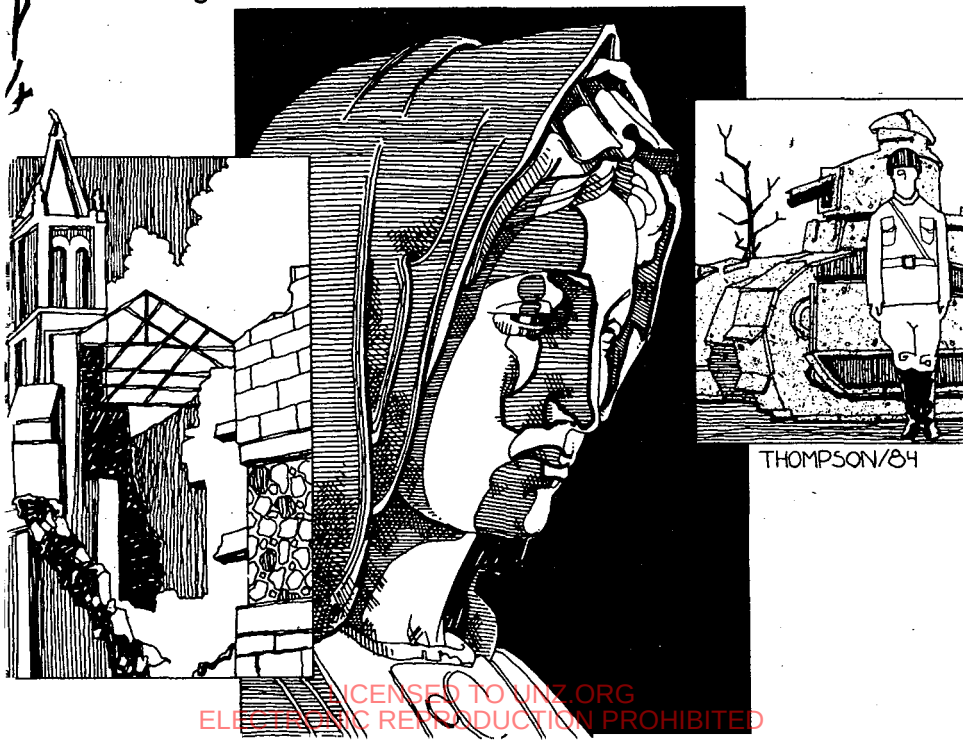
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BENEATH THE SHADOW OF HER SMILE

by Alexander Jablokov

art: George Thompson

There are certain incidents and emotions on the front lines of battle which are common to all soldiers. In this complex story Mr. Jablokov shows us, only too well, the extent to which these experiences may be shared. We believe this story is the author's first sale.



LICENSED TO LINZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By the time I got to Bert, the sound of the shelling was sharp and clear in my ears. Someone was having an artillery duel down in the direction of Montauban. There were still some French units down there, and it was close to the Somme, where trenches were damp, and tempers short. I had heard it start when I was back in Amiens, lying in a bed at Madame Berthier's, but there it hadn't seemed to matter, coming, as it did, through a set of lace curtains.

The light of the declining sun shined the wrong way through the windows of the roofless houses. Before the War, people had lived in the town, then called Albert, but no one remembered those days. There was no one here now but the soldiers, and to them the place was called Bert, with a hard, English 't.' Everyone knew Bert. French poilus shivering in the ruins of Fort Douaumont, at Verdun, pressed their crosses to their lips and thought of it. Russian conscripts drowning in shell holes at Aubers died whispering its name. German regulars on garrison duty along the Piave sang songs about it. For it was from this spot that the Golden Virgin tormented us.

Before the War, a huge, gilded statue of the Virgin had stood atop the Basilica of Albert. She had proved a natural target for the German long range guns located back towards Bapaume, though for a long time the tower suffered no damage. Finally, one day, a shell exploded just at the Virgin's feet. She toppled forward, slowly, at first, then accelerating as she swung downwards towards the earth . . . and stopped. And so she had hung there ever since, feet above her head, angled just past the horizontal, dangling, precarious, yet never falling. No amount of shelling had ever managed to get her to budge another inch. She was a miracle.

All of us, all the men of the War, were concerned about her, and about what she was trying to tell us. Theories abounded. Some held that she was throwing the infant Jesus down to the street, sacrificing Him before His time as an expiation to end the slaughter. Others thought that she was bent over in grief, for from her vantage point she could examine at her leisure the vast meatgrinder of Somme sector. Or was she just trying to dodge the shells that flew past? To me it had always seemed that He had strayed somehow, and she had just leaned forward and gathered Him back up in her arms. His expression indicated that He wasn't sure whether to be pleased.

One thing was known by everyone, from the Channel, across Switzerland, and to the Adriatic: when she ceased to balance there on her tower and at last fell, the War would end. It was obvious that she would never fall. It was rumored that she was wired in place, with cables running down into the ruined basilica, holding her up, that German gunners were under strictest orders never to fire upon the tower, that she had indeed already fallen twice, but had, each time, been replaced

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by an identical replica, for High Command, which in the soldier's mythology ruled both sides, had fattened on the nearly two decades of war that had ludicrously followed the assassination of a pompous Austrian archduke, and had no desire to ever see it end.

Two American soldiers were guarding the front of the basilica, ostensibly because it was used as an artillery spotting post. They shared a cigarette, and I could smell its aroma out where I stood in the street. I considered my chances of hitting them up for some. Rather small, I thought. Nonexistent. There was still hostility between British and American expeditionary troops, lingering from the riots and mutinies of '26 and '27. Besides, I wore pressed cardboard boots with soles made out of the treads of old tires, and my uniform was patched with bits of cloth that almost, but not quite, matched, while they looked almost like real soldiers, with polished leather boots and visored caps.

So I took a deep breath to catch the traces of tobacco smoke, glanced a last time up at the serene face of the Golden Virgin as she hovered over me, and made my way through the rubble to the far edge of town to join my company as it mustered after our liberty. The place was a dusty quadrangle that had once been a football field.

The quad was crowded with men, soberly lying to each other about the achievements of their liberties, but I saw my company standing at its usual spot, just at the corner of the military brothel, which stood where the goalposts had once been. The brothel had no name, only a number, although it was called a number of things, of course, by the men who sought release there. It was built of poured concrete, and its windows were narrow slits. Near the door was a sign detailing venereal disease symptoms, in eleven languages. The main advantage of this was that it gave one the ability to say "painful discharge" in Czech.

It had been a long time since I'd lain on one of its rough, stained pallets. I arched my back slightly as I walked, feeling the clean linen of Mme. Berthier's establishment on my bare skin, remembering. . . .

Toby had stayed out all night again. He'd been locked in the cellar the evening before, to tend to his task, which was catching mice, but he'd thought of more important matters, and I found him on the roof, smoothing his whiskers in male satisfaction, when I opened the shutters in the morning. He looked up at me, and meowed.

"Toby," I hissed. "Get the hell—"

It was too late. Lisette froze in the middle of that charming, childlike stretch and squeak with which she wakes herself, and looked out at the cat with her wide, cornflower blue eyes. She tossed her golden hair back and flounced over to the window.

"Toby!" she said, reaching out her hand. The cat rubbed against it and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

purred. "You know not to stay out like that. For that, you will stay out." She flicked him off the steeply pitched roof to the yard below, where Barbarossa, Mme. Berthier's mastiff, was waiting. I saw a yellow, yowling streak go across the yard and over the fence. He never learned. That damn, stupid, roving cat never learned.

Lisette smiled at me, and kissed my earlobe. "Poor kitty," she said. "Poor kitty." She pirouetted joyfully. I took hold of her, and she giggled. I always wanted Lisette above the others, for she was so beautiful, and simple, in both her pleasures and her cruelties.

My hand explored inside her robe. "Bad boy," she said. "Bad."

"No, no. Good. Very good."

The door opened, with a squeak of hinges. I turned. Standing in the doorway was a stout woman with dark dyed hair, and a trace of a moustache, which she made no attempt to conceal. She slapped her hands together. The fingers were loaded with rings, which glittered in the morning light.

"Time to go, Mr. Beeman," she said. Her voice was deep, yet oddly unresonant. "Please release my Lisette, as she has other duties. We have a Major of a Highlander regiment downstairs who wishes to see her." So, demurely, eyes downcast, Lisette walked past her mother and down the stairs, knotting her robe.

Mme. Berthier had several times described to me the event of Lisette's conception. It had happened when she was newly married, her husband at the Front. She was walking home from church one day, in autumn, the leaves turning, drifting down, and crunching beneath her feet, when she met her Fate, in the form of a young Canadian officer, who raped her. She remembered him vaguely, but with, as had gathered over the years, some measure of affection. He'd had golden hair, like the sun, which Lisette had inherited. After hearing the enumeration of his physical virtues, I saw him as the sort of handsome lad that schoolboys get their first crush on. I was sure that the men in his unit had loved him to distraction. Her husband, whose name I never learned, was killed at the Front shortly thereafter, and with a child to support, she took up a new profession. So Lisette had grown up on the edge of the War, eventually to work in her mother's establishment, which by the time I came there consisted of five girls in a large, well-appointed house on a quiet avenue lined with plane trees. Aristocracy, in those times. They served good English breakfasts there. I went downstairs to eat one before I left.

"Welcome home, Dick. I knew you wouldn't be able to stay away. I'd kill a fatted calf, but I have a better burnt offering." The speaker was Frank Harris, who stood with our fellow NCO, Larry Pogue, leaning against the wall of the brothel. He was a tall, broad man, with the look

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a hero, although, of course, being alive, he wasn't one. He reached into a pocket and pulled out a cigarette, which he waved at me. "American," he said. "From Virginia. At least that's what the sailor told me. Don't ask what I had to do to get it." I didn't have to.

"Take a puff, Dick." Pogue was shorter than either Harris or me, with sharp features, and dark, mystic eyes.

Although my body cried out for it, I tried to give the appearance of considering the offer judiciously, as if I didn't care. My act fooled no one, and I finally grabbed it. I felt better immediately.

Captain Totenham's ADC, Perkins, at last, after much swearing, got us all formed up for the march back to the main trench, where we would spend five days before moving back to the reserve trenches. The spot where we stood was already in front of some of our fortifications. The depth of our lines was nearly five miles. The military brothel itself, in obedience to regulations, had a Vickers .303 emplacement on its roof. The captain leaned sourly against the concrete wall, watching Perkins take roll. He had spent liberty in Paris, but it didn't seem to have made him any happier. The tap of his cane against his prosthetic left foot indicated impatience, and everyone was glad when Perkins got us lined up, and the tapping stopped.

We marched down the Roman Road, which stretched from Bert to Bapaume, on the other side of the Front. Nearly two thousand years old, it arrowed across the countryside, but had been shelled so heavily that it was only suitable for foot traffic. We reached the end of the communication trench, which burrowed gradually into the earth, and turned into it.

As we marched, the level of the ground rising above our heads, I thought of Lisette. This liberty, in response to some idle questions of hers, I had spent a great deal of time telling her about my boyhood, of the times before, as the recruiting posters had it, the King had called me to war, while she lay back on the bed, whistling at the budgie to make it sing.

I told her about my mother, and the toy soldiers. I still remember the wooden box that held them, and the splendid weight it had when they had all been carefully stacked inside. They were fragments of many of the family's boyhoods, and were all mismatched, all different colors, like meadow flowers. French cuirassiers, Russian uhlans, American bluecoats from their Civil War, red pantalooned Zouaves, long-coated foot soldiers from the army of Frederick the Great, roundhead cavalry, even one lonely Babylonian in skirt and headdress, carrying spear and shield. What pleasure those soldiers brought me! I would lose myself in arranging them, marching them in columns, charging them up the valley at Balaclava, holding Hougomont against the French at Waterloo, pounding

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the insolent Swedes at Poltava, and saving Vienna from the Turk. My men were dashing and disciplined, even if some of them, particularly the soft lead ones, were missing arms, legs, and even heads. And my mother would call me in for supper, and I would not hear.

My mother made a mistake here, for she interpreted this boyish disinclination to quit a game as insolence, which was the one thing she could not bear. My scoldings were severe. Finally, one day, exasperated, she shouted, "Stay then, with your soldiers!" and latched the door. I suppose if I had begged her forgiveness, she would soon have relented and let me inside to eat, but little boys can be more stubborn than mothers, and are seldom inclined to be wise. With forced gaiety, I picked up my men and went back to war. We fought battles beneath the kitchen window, made long retreats through rough country, then attacked again on the plain. War began to drag, the Seven Years War stretching to eighteen, the Thirty Years War to eighty. When one was over, another began. This went on, as the moon rose in the sky, illuminating the now ghostly soldiers, until the little boy's eyes grew weary and he fell asleep on the grass. Some unknown friend knocked on the door, and my mother came out and carried me inside.

We finally arrived at the main firing trench, the eight-foot-deep hole in the ground that was home. In front was a three-foot parapet of heaped earth, in back was a one-foot parados. The walls were supported by sandbags, corrugated iron, bundles of sticks, bricks, and stones. Repairs had to be continuous, else the sides of the trench would collapse.

Wire repair crews were sent out, and one group of men was set to extending a sap. We were going to build a new machine gun post at the end. Those who were not thus employed retired, despite their weariness, to their gardens, which filled the area between the parados and the mortar emplacements with a tangle of bean poles and trellises. The various regiments that occupied these trenches in turn shared these gardens through a complex set of arrangements that had grown up over the years, and by now seemed eternal. I leaned back against the parapet, crossed my arms, and watched them. I could hear two soldiers chaffing each other, obscenely comparing the sizes of their cucumbers.

"Give it up, Dick. Plant a row of peas." Pogue stood next to me, mattock in hand. "A small thing, surely."

"I'm a soldier, not a farmer, damn you," I said sharply, startled by my own vehemence.

Pogue turned away, a slight smile on his lips. "Just a suggestion, Dick, just a suggestion." He clambered over the parados and headed towards his cabbages.

"Corporal Beeman?" said a timid voice. It was Private Willoughby. He was young, not more than fifteen, and had somehow blurred features,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as if built hurriedly before the holidays. His watery blue eyes darted about in the light that escaped the entrance to the officer's dugout, and he seemed ready to bolt.

"Yes, Willoughby?"

"It's . . . it's . . ." He struggled to get the words out. "It's . . . I just saw the Yellow Man!"

Inwardly, I groaned. "Indeed? And where did you see this, ah, apparition?"

"Catfish Row. He was walking towards me with that face, all bloated, and the gas was pouring out of his mouth, just pouring out, Corporal, like smoke from a chimney. I could smell it! New mown hay. That means a German gas attack, doesn't it? Shouldn't we warn everybody?"

I sighed. "That won't be necessary. I'll go take a look. Catfish Row, you said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't talk about this to anyone else. Just stay here."

Trenches traverse to contain explosions and to prevent enfilade firing should the enemy gain control of any part of them. I headed down past Times Square and the Embarcadero. The trenches had previously been occupied by American troops, and none of us had found the energy to take down the neatly lettered signs which named the various traverses of the main trench. My universe was limited to the distance to the next bend.

The Yellow Man had made his appearance in the soldier's mythology back in the 'twenties. He was someone who had been caught in a combined gas attack with no protection, but had somehow, by the dark of the moon, been transformed, rather than killed. His skin was covered with blisters and open sores, his eyes were red and hemorrhaged, his flesh was rotting, his lips were a bright blue. He no longer breathed oxygen, but needed to inhale the poison gases for his survival. Thus, he was supposed to appear whenever a gas attack was imminent, so that he could breathe.

I turned the corner to Catfish Row. My eyes burned, and I smelled the faint odor of new mown hay. Phosgene, or diphosgene. I drew back, fingering the gas mask that hung on my hip. The moon had risen, and its light shined full into the trench. A few rats scurried about, but no Yellow Man was visible. The concentration did not seem serious, so I clipped on a simple nasopharyngeal filter rather than putting on the uncomfortable mask, and went forward. After searching around a bit, I climbed over the parapet into No Man's Land. Up and down the line I could hear desultory gunfire, and see, here and there, the eye hurting, hanging glare of Very flares. The artillery I had heard earlier had fallen silent, their crews, for the moment, weary of war. I found it just beneath

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a clump of barbed wire. A gas cylinder. It wasn't rusted, although it must have been there a while, and upon closer examination, I found that it was made out of aluminium. Damn clever, these Americans, I thought, and twisted the stopcock shut.

I jumped back into the trench. In much the same way as men see faces in rocks and tree stumps, and hear the approach of a beloved in every rustle of autumn leaves, so Willoughby had smelled the Yellow Man in the phosgene. I found someone to carry the thing off to a Field Ordnance Park, and headed back towards my home traverse.

Like a summer thunderstorm, a gunfight suddenly tore across No Man's Land. Everyone along the line joined in, shooting at nothing in particular, but making a great racket. Above me, human figures were silhouetted above the parapet, and I heard the thump of something being dumped into the trench, something about the size and shape of a human body. Another thump, softer this time, and a groan.

"Who's there?" hissed a voice. I made it out as Lieutenant Wallace's.

"Beeman."

"Good. Come give us some help while Jeremy goes to get a medic."

Jeremy King ran off into the darkness. Wallace had taken out a patrol, to investigate what the Germans were building a few hundred yards down the line. It looked to be a forward gun emplacement.

Hopkins was dead, a clean hole through his forehead. Smith and Calloway stood nearby, gasping, grateful to be back in the security of the trench. I heard moaning. Bending over, I saw Private Ackerman. His right leg was missing at the knee. The blood looked like black syrup as it spilled out in the moonlight.

I pulled off my belt, which was still real leather, and looped it around the stump of his leg as a tourniquet. I pulled it tight, and the bleeding stopped. After a moment, a Medical Officer and two stretcher bearers came and picked Ackerman up, to take him to the Casualty Clearing Station, and thence to a Base Hospital, perhaps one in England. He'd be back in six months, with an artificial leg, like Captain Totenham's. I looked in the direction they'd taken him and hoped he'd have enough sense to bring my belt back.

Pogue was waiting for me when I returned, whistling idly to himself as he cleaned the head of his mattock. The task absorbed him, and it did not seem that he noticed me.

There was something about Pogue that always bothered me. We were all superstitious, of course, and each had his own protective charm or set of ritual habits which he believed kept him from harm. Most of us kept believing in ours until we were blown to bits. I had mine. I have it still. A colored bit of rock shaped like the head of an axe, worn around the neck on a chain. Lisette gave it to me. She had found it, somewhere.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pogue's beliefs and talismans, however, carried the implication of having a significance beyond that of mere terror of dissolution, of being more religion than superstition. I didn't know why that disquieted me.

He looked up and smiled, teeth bright in his muddy face. "Yellow Man take a while to dispose of? I sent Willoughby to help with that sap; he seemed to be wanting something to do."

"Spot of bother. Hopkins got himself shot. And Ackerman left a leg in No Man's Land."

He sucked air between his teeth. "Too bad. They should have waited. Ah, well." He paused. "Have you heard how the end of the War will be signalled, Dick?"

I knew he didn't mean by wireless, or runner, or telephone, or anything like that. "I've heard the stories." The image had pursued me in dreams, after I first heard about it.

"The firing of four black or dark blue Very lights."

Flares did not come in those colors, of course, and I remembered them, in my dreams, hanging, dark and brooding, over a nighttime landscape of tattered corpses where none remained alive to note that the War was over. My mouth was full of dirt and I could not laugh. "Why are you bringing this up?"

He smiled, a secret smile. "I have that Very pistol. I bought it from an old magic woman in Amiens."

I groaned. "First Willoughby and his damned Yellow Man, and now you have to go round the bend and start blathering on about old magic women and Very pistols. You've been taken, but the crone's got a line into a supply depot somewhere. You should report her."

"Might as well report the moon for being out after curfew. Settle down, Dick. Settle down. Let me tell you a story. A war story." He sat down in the earth with the air of a man sinking into his favorite armchair, at home, in front of a fire.

"A war story," I grumbled. "Just the thing to calm my nerves." But I sat. It was cold, and damp.

"There once was a man, quite a long time ago, a man of the land, who was called to war by his King. He was afraid, afraid of leaving his familiar place, and afraid of death on the field of battle, but he obeyed, and went, leaving his crops, and his land, and his home. He served well in the war. He had a quick wit, and a sense of order, so he became their equivalent of an NCO. When the war ended, finally, he found that he did not want to return home. The slap of foreign hills beneath his sandals was a more pleasing feeling than the squish of his own soil between his toes. The work, he found, was easier, and more interesting, his men respected him, and his captains recognized him. He'd found a career for which he was suited.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So, he went to the capital, and lay a night and a day on the stone floor of the temple of the Goddess, she who made the plants to grow and the rain to fall and to whom all farmers made their prayers, and all soldiers likewise, for men wounded in battle will always call upon their mother. He beat his head against the stones and begged her to free him from his life of toil and allow him to continue at war.

"Women can be unreasonable, at least as men understand these things, and goddesses are no exception. Angered, for she misinterpreted his manly disinclination to quit what to him was an exciting game as insolence, she bade him to stay with his soldiers, if he wished, for his war was not yet over. So, he picked up his spear and his shield and went back to the war, which had started anew. They sacked cities, and forded streams; they made long retreats through the mountain passes and attacked again along the river. And he began to grow weary, for it seemed that just as the war was over, another began. . . ."

The earth *was* cold. I shifted uncomfortably, confused and irritated by Pogue's rambling. "What does this fable have to do with Very pistols?"

He yawned. "Not much, I suppose. Just a way of getting attention, a knock on the door. Let's just say that some of the soldier's comrades in arms were on somewhat better terms with the Goddess than he, and realized that it sometimes takes a third party to effect a reconciliation."

I didn't understand him at all. "And our friend the soldier?"

"Marches those hills yet."

I looked up at the beanpoles standing silver in the moonlight. "Still beats farming."

He laughed, a short, sharp sound, almost a sob. "Stubborn, stubborn. Lucky his friends are just as stubborn."

I sighed. "How much did the bloody thing cost, anyway?"

"Twenty head of cabbage, ten kilos potatoes, one kilo peas, two dozen tomatoes. Most of my summer's production."

I don't know why I played along with his stupid game. "Why do the soldier's friends keep trying?"

"Because they know that eventually they will succeed." And he stood up, slung his mattock over his shoulder, and walked off down the dark passage of the trench.

Harris and I stared off at the enemy lines, trying to see what had been built there during the night. It was just after dawn. A mist covered No Man's Land, and there was a feeling of rain clouds coming off the North Sea.

We were standing at the end of the sap dug the previous night. The barbed wire surrounding us gleamed silver, unlike the older thickets guarding the rest of the trench, which had long ago rusted to a soft,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

autumnal, orange brown color, looking more like hedgerows than like something that would tear you to shreds if you fell against it.

No Man's Land was a green carpet, vivid in the mist, which quickly swallowed the craters of exploding shells. It rained much in Picardy, and plants did well there, particularly when fertilized. No Man's Land at the Somme was probably the best fertilized area on the face of the globe.

The bodies that fell there vanished, but the equipment remained. I could see helmets, rifles, canteens, gas masks, even an occasional medal, once worn with panache in a frontal assault. Examining this detritus, I could trace the history of the War, like an archeologist winnowing potsherds. There were the remains of an experimental respirator, used in '28, the grinning remains of a skull inside it. Here lay a rifle with the stock made out of a brittle synthetic, 1931. Everywhere lay helmets. I could see one, German, with a brass spike on it, that must have been from before 1920. Another was gleaming beryl steel, of American manufacture.

Everywhere were the flowers of Picardy. Red poppies, yellow cabbage flowers, white corn flowers; for them there was no War. One helmet, overturned, served as a flower pot and was full of a bobbing mass of blue cornflowers.

Harris peered through his binoculars and scowled. "Can't see a bloody thing. Could be a machine gun emplacement. Could be the anchor point for a mechanical sapping operation. Could be a new cookhouse for the front line boys," he sniffed, "though I can't smell any sauerkraut or borscht. Could be a new twelve-hole privy, in which case I vote for an immediate assault so that we can use it before it starts to stink. Let's go." He turned, and a rat squealed beneath his feet. He aimed a kick at it, cursing, but it hid behind some duckboards.

Back in the trench, life had settled into its faded routine. A gang was repairing the trench wall. Others were cleaning their weapons, or trying to write letters. Most were trying to sleep, though, curled up in funk holes dug in the walls.

I descended into the officers' dugout. Pogue and Captain Totenham were in the NCO's dugout, discussing some operation that I didn't want to hear about, for I suspected I'd be hearing about it soon enough, and I wanted to write a letter. Most of my immediate family somehow came to be lost in the years of war, but I had been thinking about a cousin, or perhaps second cousin, who had moved off to Liverpool or Manchester when I had been a child. He'd been mentiond at my house once or twice, though I didn't remember by whom. I had no one else to write to, and I thought that if I sent it off to General Delivery at those two cities, he might get the letter. I preferred writing on tables to balancing things on my knees and was hoping that the table in the dugout would be free.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lieutenant Wallace was sitting at it, filling out a letter of condolence to the parents of Hopkins. He had a little book, issued to officers, open to the page which contained the approved phrases and adjectives for letters of condolence to the relatives of soldiers killed in action.

He looked up. "Beeman, I'm stuck here. Which would you say Hopkins was, gallant, brave, or intrepid?"

I remembered the hole through his forehead. "How, precisely, did he die?"

"He tried to jump me, and I was forced to shoot him with my pistol. He panicked, wanted to go back. Bloody bother, and my shot brought fire down on us. Tough luck, for Ackerman, that."

I gave it some thought. "Heroic. Try heroic."

He peered at his book. "Hmmm . . . doesn't seem to be on the list, Beeman. Funny thing, that. 'Heroic' isn't here. Neither is 'bloody fool,' for that matter. 'Intrepid.' Good word, intrepid. A public school, ruggers sort of word." He wrote it down, pleased with himself.

It took me less than five minutes to give up on the letter. I couldn't think of a thing to write, and I realized that I wasn't even sure of his name. I decided to try again some other time, and left the dugout.

Outside, the sky had clouded up, and a drizzle looked imminent. I yawned, and realized how long it had been since last I slept. I looked around. Pogue and the Captain were still in our dugout, and near me was a two-man funk hole with only one man in it: Willoughby. I pulled out my waterproof sheet and curled up next to him.

Sleeping, I dreamed. The land was green and fruitful. The corn was high, and date palms hung their heavy loads of fruit over the fresh running irrigation channels. I ran across the fields, tripping over the uneven soil, hearing the sounds of her hounds close behind me. They dug in the earth, the men of that land, slowly and patiently, their faces shaded from the glaring sun by broad-brimmed felt hats. They did not heed my cries for aid, but continued to dig their earth, grinding the clods up. Some swung sickles, collecting the sheaves of corn. The land was flat, horizon to horizon, but ahead of me rose a hill, steep, and atop it stood a tower. I ran up its side. It was covered with brambles, and my shirt tore, and I bled, but I continued to run, for I still heard the hounds, and she was still in pursuit of me. I tore free of the brambles and ran up the steps of the Basilica, stopping directly beneath the Virgin. The American guards were gone. She looked down on me with a half smile, even as her hounds closed on me. Pulling a knife from my pocket, I started to lever at one of the bricks. I could hear the sharp crump of the German 88s and the return fire of French mortars. A strange, broad-winged monoplane with English markings flew overhead and, as it banked away to the left, the pilot, in his clever enclosed cockpit, waved to me in greeting. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brick finally came loose. Someone tapped my shoulder, and Pogue was close behind me, wearing a wide-brimmed felt hat. He stretched out his hand. Between thumb and forefinger he held a pea. I paused a moment, my heart full of wild rage, but I heard the bay of the hounds, ever nearer, and at last, with a feeling of surrender, took the pea and thrust it into the opening left by the brick. The entire Basilica creaked and groaned. The guns stopped. A pea plant emerged from the hole and crawled its way up the side of the tower. I looked up at the Virgin. Her expression was joyful, radiant. She leaned forward to gather me up into her arms. Then, there was a rumble, and at long last she broke free of the tower and began to fall towards me. As she got closer, I saw that she wore Lisette's face. For a moment, I was happy, then felt the sharp fear of being crushed beneath her. I cried out "Mother!" as her face rushed towards me. . . .

I awoke. Willoughby had huddled against me in his sleep, pushing me into the side of the funk hole. He was murmuring "Mother . . . Mother . . ." under his breath, shivering. With a surge of annoyance, I shoved him over to the other side, where he remained. A light rain was falling from the sky. I let it fall on my face, trying to pretend that the tracks of tears were nothing but raindrops.

I stood up and looked at the sky. From the looks of the light, evening stand-to would be shortly. I heard the whistle of an incoming shell. Instead of diving into a funk hole and cowering against the wall, I looked up. It hit a few traverses down from where I stood. The blast thundered and cast a soldier into the air. He had his arms flung out, as if to embrace the sky. His body landed on the parapet, where it was stitched by machine gun fire by a German who had no better target. A hand reached out and grabbed the body by an ankle, pulling it back into the trench. The firing stopped.

Captain Totenham walked up to me and told me that Pogue and I were leading a patrol that night. I said nothing.

The air in No Man's Land is thick and cloying, quite unlike the sweat and cordite stink of the trenches. The ground is soft, like dead man's flesh, which does, in fact, make up part of its composition. Every bump and dip in that terrain was familiar to us, but only familiar as seen at night, through a haze of fear.

Pogue strode on, past the huge old mine crater, full of water. Willoughby hung back with me, and looked as unhappy as I felt. We were to chuck a few grenades at the new German forward gun emplacement. It worried Captain Totenham, gave him trouble sleeping. Poor fellow. The wreckage of a German tank bulked to our left, and we angled away

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from it. It was about forty yards past that point that we ran into the German patrol.

They were as surprised to see us as we were to see them, I think, but there were six of them to three of us. Willoughby reacted faster than anyone, promptly turning and fleeing. I heard him cry out as the gunfire brought him down.

I dropped to the ground, reaching for my grenades. Pogue dove forward and rolled past the Germans. I saw a glint of metal as he reached . . . and fired straight up into the air. The Very pistol. "It can't go on forever," he called. "Good luck, Dick!" I raised myself up and tried to throw a grenade, but dropped it when a hot poker plunged through my shoulder. I tried to use my other hand to find the grenade, whose pin I had already pulled, but it was on the wrong side of my body. I rolled on my back to get at it, knowing I was dead. Above me, glowing in the night sky like holes to another universe, were four dark blue, almost black, spots, arranged equidistant from each other. I fought against it, but felt the darkness wash over me like a warm tide.

Bright sunlight pried its way between my eyelids. I turned my head, to escape the glare, and felt an explosion in my shoulder. The pain shocked me awake. I was lying on the wet earth where I had fallen. The grenade I dropped had not exploded. What luck. Now I could just lie here until a German gunner decided to pump a few slugs into me to make sure I was dead. I lay there, squinting at the blue sky. The silence was total, preternatural. There was no gunfire, no explosions. Finally, unable to stand it, I raised my head and looked around me.

Fifty yards away lay the German trenches. Or rather, obviously, where the German trenches had been some decades past. There was no barbed wire, no gun emplacements, no parapet. Only a shallow depression, overgrown and eroded. The British trench, on the other side, was the same. Straining, I managed to stand up. I did a slow turn around, examining the peaceful, leafy, country landscape.

It was then that I saw the corpses. It looked to be the result of a firefight. Five bodies, three in green uniforms, two in grey. I put up a hand to rub my forehead, and froze. The uniform I had been wearing for as long as I could remember had never been this shade of green, and had been tighter around the wrist. This uniform was just as worn, just as threadbare. But it was not the one I had been wearing last night. It was, in fact, the mate of those worn by three of the five corpses.

They lay scattered around the wreckage of a lorry, overturned and still smoking. A blackened circle in the grass showed a petrol tank explosion. I walked over and turned one of the bodies over. Its placid, anonymous face told me nothing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I heard the grind of gears and a laboring engine. Coming from the direction of what had been German lines was another lorry. I braced myself, although I was feeling so weak that there was nothing I could have done to defend myself.

The lorry had a white star on the door and a black man at the wheel. He looked at me, as if unsure of whether to stop. I was standing in his way, so he finally did. We stared at each other.

"Could you give me a lift to the nearest dressing station?" I asked, holding my shoulder.

"There's a field hospital near Albert," he said, with an American accent. "Hop in." I dragged myself into the cab with my good arm and we started off.

"Trouble?" he said.

"Bit of a dust up. Nothing serious."

He grunted. "We should all be so lucky. Big battle, I hear, at Boutencourt, on the road to Rouen," he pronounced it 'ruin,' "and it don't sound good. Damn. Goddam. It's been a year since I got here, and I want to see Paree, and it don't look like I'm going to get to soon. Sheeit. Some big deal Invasion this turned out to be. Those that planned it aren't getting their asses shot off, you can bet on that."

"They never do," I agreed. Invasion? Were we so badly off here that we weren't even in Paris? Or were we fighting the French?

Ahead of us was the town of Albert, no longer Bert. It was the way it must have been before the War, full of small, ugly houses of red brick. And—I looked hard. The Basilica stood, and on top of it, proudly erect, was the Golden Virgin. A flight of monoplanes, which my comrade identified as Spitfires, roared by overhead on their way south. We drove through town and he dropped me at the dressing station.

That was two weeks ago. I was treated by a doctor and billeted. No one questioned my right to exist. The War had ended here a long time ago, and was called World War I, because World War II was here, and I was part of it, as a member of the invasion force that had crossed the Pas de Calais the previous year and now held most of the Artois peninsula, though there was talk of a German counteroffensive before winter. It was early September here too. September, 1947.

Pogue had achieved something, for I was, vaguely, starting to remember the ages of soldiering, in wars that always went on too long. I received my orders today. I am to report to the front, which is south of Amiens, along the western reaches of the Somme. From my cot, I can see the Virgin in her tower. She is smiling at me, but that tells me nothing.

They say the war should be over by 1949, 1950 at the latest. I can hear some of the hospital orderlies relaxing by digging in their gardens, just behind my tent. They are strengthening their squash poles, each thump-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing at his own squash with evident pride. Others are spading the soil around their parsnips. I roll over and look at them, catching glints of metal through a gap in the tent as they dig in the sunlight. One of them, wearing a broad brimmed, floppy hat, looks very much like Pogue. . . . I look at them and think, about thousands of years of his earnest advice, and his knock on the door. I should take a spade and join them. I really should.

Maybe then, Mother will let me come inside. ●

MARTIN GARDNER

(from page 23)

SOLUTION TO BAR BETS ON THE BAGEL

Both Flarp and Pulver failed to solve the problem. When Couth showed how to move the two matches (see Figure 3), Pulver guffawed and slapped

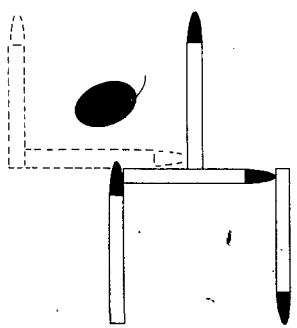


Figure 3

his forehead. "Amazing!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't *I* think of it?"

"Because you're stupid," said Flarp, "that's why."

Pulver was unoffended. He stared intently at the pattern on the table. "I can't believe it," he said at last, "but I think I've discovered a way to solve the problem by moving just *one* match."

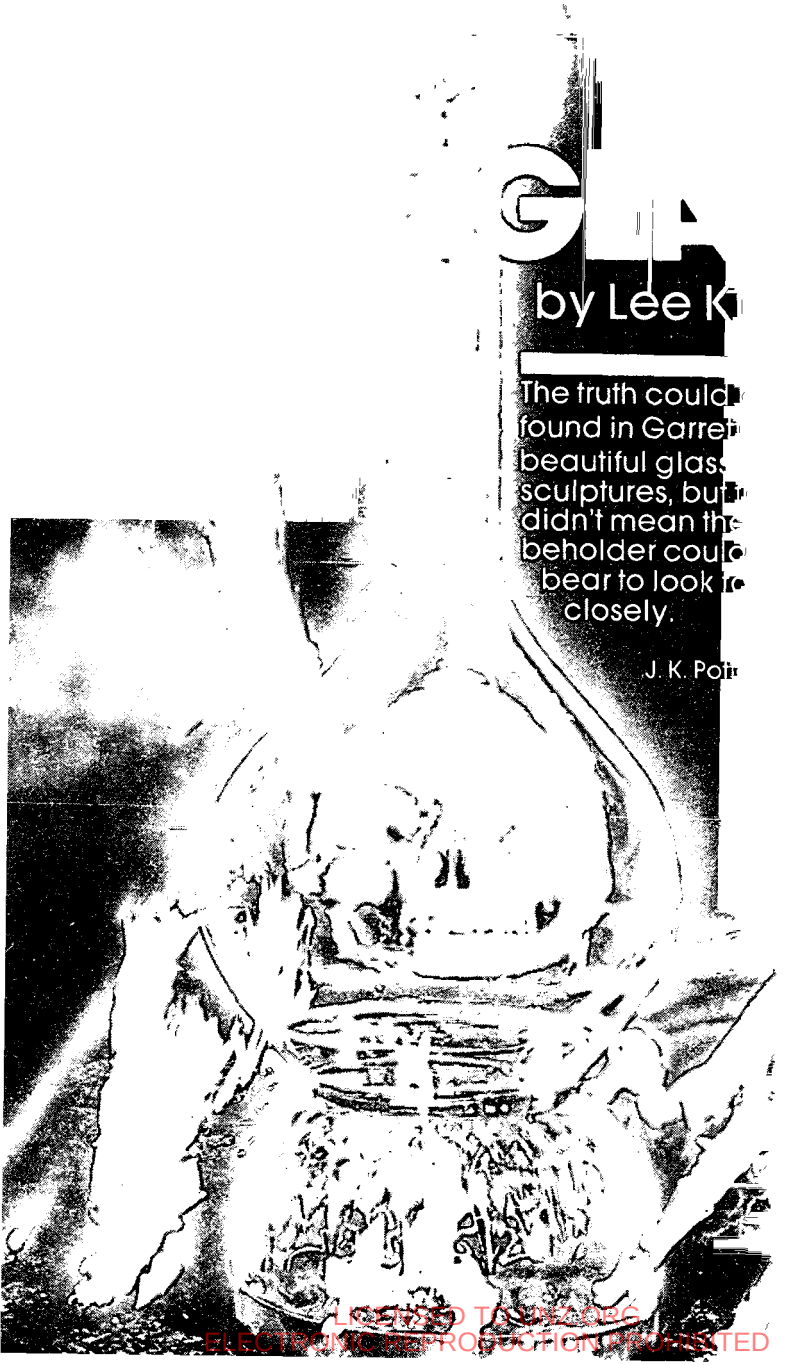
"In words of one syllable," snorted Flarp, "impossible."

"Don't be too sure," said Pulver, wagging a finger in front of Flarp's nose. "Will you buy my next drink if I'm wrong?"

"It's a deal," said Flarp.

What in the name of Asimov does Pulver have in mind? You can find out on page 190.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



G

by Lee K

The truth could
found in Garret
beautiful glass
sculptures, but
didn't mean the
beholder could
bear to look
closely.

J. K. Pot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Since our father's death, my siblings and I have looked out for one another with fierce protectiveness, but the bonds are more than blood and our common love of glass. There is also shared terror. The public remembers Joshua Benet as a name synonymous with fine glass, like Tiffany, Gallé, and Lalique, but it is his death I cannot forget, ten years of descent into raving madness, lurching and twitching and screaming paranoid accusations until nothing remained of the father Claudia, Garrett, and I had worshipped. Nothing but the legacy of his genius in our hands, and cold-sweat dread of the time bomb in our genes.

So it was no surprise to have Claudia calling me during the day at Johns Hopkins where I blew glass apparatus for research projects. "Dane, someone has to talk to Garrett. He's taken up another of those religious cults, a pagan one this time, I think."

Hardly a reason for so much concern that I could see. Garrett had been religion-hopping since he left home for college. "He's a grown man, Claudia."

I could see her at the other end of the line, calling from her studio filled with stained glass and leading, and the largest privately-owned inventory of vitamins and health foods in the hemisphere. We each had our defense against Fate. I could not see that Garrett's was any more ridiculous than Claudia's.

"Why not let him live the way he wants?"

Her breath hissed over the wire. "In the first place, this time the high priestess or whatever has actually moved in with him—Aletheia, she calls herself, no last name, just Aletheia—and . . . she's not content with just taking his money. Obviously you haven't been to his new exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art."

"I haven't even talked to him for a month."

"There's an article in *Newsweek*. You'd better read it."

I remembered a copy of the magazine in the lounge. Running down the hall after it, I pawed through to the Arts page.

"Benet a la Bosch," the headline read. I have no idea what the writer thought about the exhibit; I never saw the text. Color photographs of three pieces in the exhibit illustrated the article and for me, nothing else existed on the page. Garrett had made his reputation on glass portraits and sculptures which seemed to defy gravity, crystal thread spun into dreams of moonbeams and starfire. But the pieces in these pictures . . . A chunk of lead crystal like a fragment of glacier trapped some creature frozen in a moment of desperate struggle. A fairy palace light and frothy as cloud cast a twisted, demonic shadow. The third photo showed two views of the same vase. Seen from the front it seemed no different than his usual work, but the fresh young girl's face within the glass became that of a toothless hag when the light shone through it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I stared at the photographs. Could a cult really have influenced Garrett to start producing pieces like these? Perhaps he had just gone commercial. The Beautiful People lost in the ennui of sunning and gambling in their villas in St. Tropez and Monte Carlo would love these. The novelty, the duality of ugliness in beauty, would bring them flocking from the galleries of now commonplace sonic and tropic sculptures, from the holosymphony performances and boutiques of chamelemode clothing and silicivitae jewelry.

But I could not help remembering something else, something Claudia had either overlooked or chosen to ignore, that Father, too, had changed his style as deterioration swallowed him.

Twenty-four hours later I stepped off the plane in Gateside and caught the cabletrain for Aventine.

Artists built the mountain retreat. The rich and famous have discovered its isolated peace and filled the shores of the Lunamere and Heliomere with their villas, but the center still belongs to the artists. Shops and studios with balconied living quarters above them lined Terpsichore Road and the other muse-named streets I walked on the way to Garrett's studio. Sonic sculpture sang at me in passing. A kinetropic piece recognized movement near it and rattled a greeting with wooden rings. Garrett's studio had no sign, no streetside sample, only a window etched into a delicate floral fantasy surrounding large letters: BENET, and under them, smaller and simply: *Glass*. I pushed open the front door.

The smells inside were those of my life . . . acid and hot glass and the warm-metal scent of an annealing oven. Past three straight wooden chairs and a single glass showcase holding a half dozen or so finished pieces, the studio spread beneath fluorescent lamps: tables scattered with pieces of cut glass and works-in-progress; bins of glass rods and irregular chunks; an asbestos and stone-topped workbench with holders, spreaders, gas jets, blowpipe; another workbench under a strong light, backed by a rack of enamel and acid bottles. A gangly form sat at that workbench with his back to the door.

"I'll be with you in a minute," Garrett said.

I trotted across the studio to his shoulder. "Is that any way to greet your kid brother?"

For the first time in my life, he did not grin and hurl himself at me. Instead, Garrett's fingers whitened on his paintbrush. "Did Claudia send you?"

"I saw the *Newsweek* article on your exhibit and thought as long as I was on vacation, I'd drop in." It was half the truth at least. "An interesting change in style."

"Is that what you think?"

His voice shut me out, remote as the peaks above Aventine. Remem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bering my father's black moods, my gut knotted. "Garrett—" I began hoarsely.

Overhead, the ceiling creaked. Garrett looked up for a moment, then turned toward me. "It's begun, Dane."

The knots tightened. "Have you been to a doctor?"

He frowned irritably. "I don't need a doctor. We all know the signs . . . depression, inexplicable and uncontrollable anger, incoordination, twitches. There've been times when my hands shook so much I couldn't work, and I'm thirty-six, the same age when Father—"

"An anxiety reaction," I interrupted. "You're giving yourself the signs just by worrying—"

"Dane, stop it!" His arm raised and for a moment I thought he might smash his work to the floor, an antique-looking, footed bowl of streaky opalescent amber glass, what the Victorians called a coupe, but he stopped and after a moment, resumed work on it . . . painting the silhouette of an antique car, I saw now. "You think that by refusing to admit something exists, it can't. That's no answer, any more than Claudia's vitamins and brewer's yeast."

The ceiling creaked again. This time I recognized the cause, someone walking. The soft footsteps crossed overhead toward the staircase at the end of the room. A pair of bare feet appeared on the stairs.

"But there is an answer," Garrett said. "Dane, may I present Aletheia."

The woman came down the stairs, all long, smooth limbs, brief neo-Grecian playsuit, and ebony hair pulled up into a casual topknot, but the thought that crossed my mind was "Pygmalion," not "priestess." For under the studio lights her hair had a shifting purple sheen, as though it were not black at all but deep iridescent violet, and her skin glowed with the pearly inner light of glass reaching the melting point. In a moment of caught breath, reaching out for a slender hand that felt hot, too, I wondered if Garrett's genius could have created her of opalescent glass, giving her the classic face of a Greek statue and setting her eyes with amethysts, then used the knowledge from his arcane religions to breath life into her.

"In a manner of speaking, perhaps he did." Her amethyst eyes smiled into mine, then while I was still realizing that I had not spoken my thought aloud, shifted past me to an askance focus on Otherness that sent a chill up my spine. *Madness,* the eyes said. "I'll check the oven, Garrett. The bowl for the Kimbrough wedding should be ready."

The voice was like crystal, clear and smooth but somehow . . . transparent. When it stopped, I could remember the words but never the *sound* of the voice.

Aletheia padded gracefully across the room to the annealing oven. The light there made a purple nimbus of her hair but her skin glowed on its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own, a white heat shimmering hypnotically against the darkness of the paneling behind her.

It took an effort to look away from her to Garrett. "I didn't know you were living with anyone," I lied. "How long have you been together? Where did you meet her?"

"It isn't what you think. She walked into the Gallery Cafe a couple of weeks ago, looking for a job and a place to stay. I have more room than I need and I had been wanting someone for housekeeping and odd jobs in the studio, so . . ." He shrugged. But he avoided my eyes. "She has a real gift with glass. I've begun to let her do all the annealing."

I glanced toward her. Aletheia swung back the lid of the annealing oven. Reaching in, she lifted out a thick crystal bowl which had been put in for reheating and a slow cooling that would relieve the stresses the process of fabrication put in it. So Aletheia could not be responsible for the pieces in the exhibit, I reflected, and maybe there was no new cult after all. Still . . .

I glanced sideways at my brother. Garrett watched her with an intensity, a *fervor,* that sent a chill down my spine. I lowered my voice so Aletheia could not hear. "Come on, Garrett, no woman that beautiful has to keep house and pick up around an artist's studio for a living. What's she really doing here?"

He hesitated, then: "Her name means 'the healer.' "

My gut wrenched. Oh, god. "Don't tell me you were fooling around with something and because she showed up you think you summoned her?"

He looked away. "She says she can cure me."

I sighed. "With what, magical incantations?"

"She *can* cure me, Dane." Faith burned in his eyes. "When she touches me, the moods end. My hands quit shaking."

I glanced toward Aletheia. She appeared to have heard nothing. Setting the bowl on a work table and kneeling down to turn it in slow examination totally engrossed her.

Watching her, it occurred to me that if Garrett's symptoms were merely the result of anxiety and she reassured him out of them, what was the harm in her for now? I could stay on a while to make sure she demanded nothing extravagant for her "services."

Staring into the lead crystal, Aletheia sighed.

The sound touched a reflex bred into both of us. We ran for the bowl.

"Did it crack?" Apprehension edged Garrett's voice.

"No." The amethyst eyes looked up at him, past us both, focused on Otherness. "There will be no wedding."

My relief over the bowl changed to amusement. "No wedding." I tried

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to smile, but something in that mad, askance gaze and flat pronouncement paralyzed the muscles. "What makes you think so?"

"The glass." She caressed the rim of the bowl absently. "The images don't join."

I squatted down beside Garrett at the work table. The bowl was laminate work, layer upon layer etched with delicate floral designs and two portraits, presumably of the bride and groom. As usual with Garrett, the detail was exquisite. The two beautiful young heads in their gossamer bower looked three-dimensional, like holographs. Logically, then, at some point in seeing the portraits through the glass they should have superimposed over each other. They did not. No matter how we turned the bowl, the two images never crossed. They lay on one side of each other until they almost touched, then abruptly jumped to the other side.

I tried again and again to superimpose the images, turning the bowl repeatedly. "It's some trick of defraction, isn't it, Garrett? How did you do it?"

"I don't know." He caught his lip between his teeth.

"No trick," Aletheia said. "It is what is." She padded away up the stairs.

I followed, leaving Garrett staring into the bowl in fascination.

Aletheia must have headed straight for the balcony. I found her there leaning against the rail, looking up at the snow-capped peaks. Afternoon light played purple and blue over her hair and soaked into her skin, intensifying the glow until she looked almost incandescent. Around us curled a cool breeze filled with the scent of mountain pine, the laughing voices of the tourists window-shopping along the street below, and the mixed chorus of a dozen sonic sculptures in the studio opposite.

"I do nothing to the glass," Aletheia said without looking at me.

I started. "You only prophesy and read minds."

She stroked the railing. "I don't prophesy. What is, is."

"That's how you plan to heal Garrett?"

Now she looked around, though she barely glanced at me before her focus slipped. "I never said I could heal him. Help him, though, yes."

"He thinks you have a cure. He says your name means 'the healer.' "

It came out more accusingly than I intended. Her gaze focused, and the intensity made her eyes glitter more jewel-like than ever. Light shimmered gold and pink around her skin. "He believes what he wishes to believe. He doesn't think clearly." She sighed. "He doesn't ask the right questions."

The light from her was beginning to give me a headache. I frowned irritably. "What questions? What do questions have to do with helping him?"

"I cannot seek. I must be sought. I am Aletheia."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I am Aletheia. She said it like a title. Names. Something jogged in my head, but of course when I tried to identify it, it slipped out of reach.

I stared into the amethyst eyes for a minute, groping in vain for the elusive thought, then left the balcony and went back downstairs. Garrett had returned to painting the coupe.

"Part of my luggage is still at the cabletrain station," I told him. "I'm going after it."

He nodded without looking up.

But I went to the library, not the station.

Aletheia had supper ready by the time I returned to the studio. It was a brief, quiet affair. Garrett bolted his food so he could go back to work and Aletheia stared at/through him into whatever other dimension she saw. I ate in silence, too, wondering what to do with the information I had learned. Saying anything could destroy the relief Garrett thought Aletheia brought. Silence, on the other hand, would only sharpen his despair when the "cure" failed.

And on the other third hand, I could not stay forever, and what might happen to him when I finally left him with this mad-eyed woman?

Afterward, I followed Garrett downstairs and sat watching while he fused another layer of glass on the coupe.

"A commission?" I asked.

He looked up from the coupe and gas torch, eyes purple behind the didymium lenses of his goggles. "The winner's cup for the Diana Mountain Road Race next week. It's their seventy-fifth year and they wanted something nostalgic and appropriately commemorative."

"A coupe is certainly appropriate for a road race."

Admittedly, the humor was feeble, but I expected him to at least smile. He did not.

I bit my lip, then taking a deep breath, asked, "Who told you Aletheia's name means 'the healer'?"

Garrett did not answer immediately. The flame of his torch flared from blue to blinding orange against the glass. Through the goggles, though, I knew it would look only pink. After a minute, he said, "It's something I remember from when Mother was pregnant with you, a discussion about names and what they mean. Why?"

"Because I looked it up. *Althea* means 'the healer.' "

The orange blaze washed across the bowl of the coupe. "So? Her name is a variation."

I was tempted to leave the matter at that. The truth might well do him more harm than good. Then I thought again of the strange woman upstairs with her opalescent skin and eyes focused on Otherness. "No. Aletheia means 'the truth.' " I took a breath. "Garrett, you haven't called

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up some healing spirit. Whoever Aletheia is and wherever she comes from, she's mad. I think she believes that she is her name, that she is the personification of Truth. However she did that trick with the wedding bowl, she did it to support her fantasy."

"Fantasy." He looked up then. Lifted from the bowl, the torch flame dimmed to blue again. "I forgot to tell you. After you left for the station I called the Kimbroughs to tell them the bowl was ready. The wedding's off. The bride eloped this afternoon with another man."

He had gone back to the coupe and the goosebumps subsided on my spine before it occurred to me I could have pointed out that prophesies did not make a healer. By that time it was too late, though; Garrett had soundproofed himself with concentration.

I might have brought up the subject again later as the three of us sat out on the balcony sometime after midnight, watching the blaze of stars overhead and listening to the chorus of sonic sculptures fade into silence. The opalescent paleness of Aletheia's skin shone misty in the darkness, turning her to a phantom curled cross-legged in a basket chair.

She tilted back her head and breathed deeply. "It's good here. Artists ask deep questions, and honestly desire answers. In too much of the world I have been twisted and raped by people who consider Truth something to be tailored to order."

I wanted to poke Garrett. *See? Listen to the voice of unreason.* But I did not. That wedding had been canceled, and Aletheia understood Garrett. He believed what he wanted to. As long as he thought this strange woman was a weapon to fight fate, I could tell him nothing.

Up the street, a whoop of group laughter broke the quiet. A sonic sculpture whined in response, setting off others, a ripple of sleepy sharps and flats spreading down the street ahead of the merrymakers like a bow-wave. As they neared us, I recognized several as Garrett's neighbors I had met on previous visits, including Caroline Edmund-Leigh, the holosymphony composer, and poet Tony Jubal.

They halted below us and Tony called up, "Did you know you're a modern oracle?"

Garrett blinked. "What?"

"Darius Miller's new play, *The Man In The Concrete Glider,* opened tonight at the Blue Orion Theatre in Gateside with Kelsi Ferris in the leading role."

"A role the gossip columns say Maya Chaplain moved heaven and earth to land," Caroline added in the tone of one savoring something delicious. "Didn't I see Maya in your studio a couple of weeks ago buying a crystal egg?"

"Yes," Garrett replied slowly.

"Well," Tony drawled, "after the opening we attended the cast party,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Kelsi told us that 'someone' sent her a crystal egg just before the show opened with an unsigned card in it reading: *A wish for you and all the cast.* Only a strange thing happened. Kelsi picked up the egg and was holding it, and she swears it looked perfect, not a crack anywhere in it, when it suddenly fell into a dozen pieces in her hands."

"And the play didn't lay an egg," another of the women said. "The word from inside sources is that critics were already raving as they left the theatre."

My breath stuck in my chest.

Aletheia laughed, a ringing sound as clear as tapped crystal. "Glass is wonderful, so responsive. They should have thought of it at Delphi and Dodona."

"Delphi glass," Tony said. "I like the sound of that. I think I'll use it in my next poem."

The group trooped on. Garrett stared after them until they turned the corner out of sight, then looked around at Aletheia. "You knew. When Miss Chaplain picked up the egg you said, 'It won't do her any good.' " He smiled thinly. "Do you still think she's mad, Dane?"

Not mad, no, but . . . "I don't know what she is."

Darkness turned Aletheia's eyes to obsidian, but they still glittered, reflecting the light from below. "I am Aletheia."

Garrett's smile vanished, uncertainty suddenly in his eyes as he watched Aletheia. Was he remembering what I told him her name meant? My gut knotted in sympathy and self-recrimination. Why had I said anything? At least he had had hope before.

This is better for him, though.

The words sounded so clearly in my head that I thought Aletheia was speaking, but when I glanced toward her, her lips did not move. I stared, then frowned angrily. Better! How could this be better?

Aletheia smiled. In my head her voice said: *Watch.*

I watched. Over the next few days I watched Garrett throwing himself into his work with grim haste. I watched Aletheia. And I watched the glass, examining each piece before and after annealing. Sometimes they changed. When Aletheia put them in the oven, pieces came out with designs that had not been present before.

Like the vase a woman had commissioned as a gift for her very wealthy fiance. Garrett etched her portrait into the crystal and from the front her stunning beauty showed to perfection. At any other angle, however, the face twisted, revealing vanity, selfishness, and avarice.

And like the Road Race coupe.

Aletheia's soft intake of breath brought both Garrett and me running to bend anxiously over the coupe.

At first I wondered what she had seen. The original design appeared

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intact. The shapes of antique race cars drifted all through the streaked glass, some visible on the outside surface, some from inside the bowl, others as phantoms below the surface, like memories half-forgotten or competitors obscured by dust. Turning the coupe produced neither new shapes in the glass nor altered the ones already there. Then I noticed the light. Coming through the bowl it looked not golden but pulsing, flickering scarlet, and where it danced around the cars, the silhouettes sank into twisted frames stained a bloody red.

My gut knotted. Another addition to the Delphi collection?

"What kind of disaster are you wishing on us this time?" Garrett said softly.

Aletheia regarded him solemnly. "I don't make the future. What is, is."

Garrett traced the rim of the coupe, following the bead with his finger . . . around and around and around.

The day of the race, we watched it on television, but not like most viewers, I am sure. We sat in silence, Garrett's and my eyes fixed intently on the screen. Apprehension chased along my spine. Aletheia—I wish I knew what Aletheia felt or saw. She curled cross-legged in a dark arm chair that intensified her glowing pallor, face expressionless, hands relaxed in her lap, jewel eyes focused past the television on . . . whatever.

For three-quarters of its distance, the race went well. A car spun out here and there. A French car scraped the barrier at the edge of the dropoff on the outside of a sharp switchback. One American's tire blew out. A billowing cloud of white smoke announced the demise of an Italian engine. None of it serious, except perhaps in the viewpoint of the Italian, who stormed around his car with waving arms, shouting a diatribe as histrionic and rhythmic as an operatic aria.

Then the lead cars reached Scorpion Turn.

The front tires on Victor Dietrich's Porsche dissolved simultaneously in flying shreds of rubber. Seconds later the car was spinning across the road, into the inner wall, rebounding from it in a leaping roll that brought it down on two following cars. An orange fireball enveloped the three. A passing car trying to avoid the pileup skidded sideways, through the guard rail and into emptiness.

Everything behind the fire was invisible to the TV camera, but in the end, the statistics came to four drivers dead, three others hospitalized.

Garrett slammed his fist down on the arm of the couch. "I should have said something. I should have warned them!"

"You can't change the future, either," Aletheia said distantly.

He came to his feet, whirling on her. "Then what are you doing here! Who and what *are* you?"

She sighed. "If you refuse to know, how can I ever help you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Garrett exploded, as suddenly and lividly as the racing cars. Grabbing her by the shoulders, he jerked Aletheia out of the chair and to her feet. "What the hell can Truth do for me!" he shouted. "Will you prophesy my end, tell me the measure of my productive days? Is that supposed to *help* me!"

She looked up at him with compassion. "The right questions will help you."

"Questions." Face contorted in rage and despair, Garrett shook her. "Damn your questions!"

Alethia's head snapped back and forth. Galvanized by the memory of our father's murderous rages, I leaped at Garrett. "Stop it! Let her go before you kill her!"

We went down on the floor in a tangle. Somehow, though, Aletheia peeled clear. From the corner of my eye I saw her retreating across the room to watch us with glittering eyes. Garrett thrashed under me, kicking and swinging, but he only managed one good connection that left my head ringing before I pinned both his arms. He might be the older, the smarter, the more gifted, but I was always faster and stronger.

He struggled a minute more, then went limp. "Dane. Oh, god, Dane."

The cry of anguish stabbed through my gut. I hugged him fiercely, searching for something comforting and reassuring to say . . . something that would reassure me, too. "It's all right. You've got Claudia and me. No matter what comes, however unthinkable, we'll face it together."

His shudders stopped. "Face?" Suddenly he sat up and pulled away to where he could look at me. "Face. That's it." He twisted to look at Aletheia. "The question?"

She smiled faintly.

He rolled to his feet and headed for the stairs.

I started to follow, but a fever-hot hand caught my arm. "Please don't. Let him work."

I looked around into the amethyst eyes. They focused on me and remained there, intense, earnest . . . fiercely happy. I stared at her. "What question?"

Regret dimmed her eyes only a little. "A private one."

I fought a desire to shake her, too. "Is it the right one? Do you promise this will really help him?"

The heat of her hand seared my arm. "I promise."

I gave him his privacy. That did not stop me from speculating on what he could be making, though. My best guess was a self-portrait in glass, to see exactly what he faced and how soon.

Garrett worked the rest of the day and through the night. The several times I woke, I heard voices and movement below. But in the morning

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I found him in the kitchen clear-eyed and singing while he made toast and coffee.

Astonishment and relief washed through me. I wanted to hug Aletheia. She had been right. "You must have liked the answer. What was the question?"

He only smiled and left the toaster long enough to put a shoe box on the top shelf of a cupboard.

Then it dawned on me that *he* was cooking. "Where's Aletheia?"

"Gone." He turned to smile at me again. "And you should be going, too. You have your work. So do I."

Could he really be the anguished brother of yesterday? "What did you see in the glass?"

He hesitated only a moment. "Freedom. Come on, finish up. I'll help you pack and walk you to the cabletrain station."

We walked, joking and laughing with an ease we had not enjoyed for years. It was a beautiful morning, I remember, cool and golden. I left him on the platform luminous with contentment.

A month later Claudia called again to tell me Garrett had died of a self-administered barbiturate overdose.

He willed me the studio: " . . . in the hope you'll stop squandering your talent on the sterility of laboratory glass and produce something more worthy of your blood." I turned in my resignation and took possession of the studio.

And before the suitcases were even unpacked, I headed for the kitchen. The shoebox was no longer on the shelf where I had seen Garrett put it, however. I swore. Now I would have to search the entire house and studio.

"That isn't necessary," a voice said behind me. "I took it to keep the police from finding it."

I had not heard her come in but it did not surprise me to find Aletheia there. I turned to look into amethyst eyes. "You must not have gone far."

"I am never very far away." She handed over the shoebox.

My hands shook a bit as I laid it on the counter and opened it. Tissue wrapped the object inside. I stripped it off . . . and caught my breath.

Garrett had spent that night making a goblet, blown in the same streaky opalescent amber glass as the Road Race coupe, and he had put a face on it, but not his. The empty eye sockets and lipless mouth of a sculpted death's head leered at me from the glass.

I looked up from it to Aletheia. She smiled past me, radiating light, eyes askance as ever . . . but somehow no longer looking mad.

Slowly, I looked down at the goblet again and turned it to the position the shape of the rim would force a drinker to use. That put the death's head on the opposite side where the skull cast a shadow through the glass. Tilting the goblet, though, the skull softened into a face, sexless

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but . . . attractive, friendly . . . compassionate. *What did you see in the glass?* I whispered in memory. *Freedom,* Garrett's voice replied. Perhaps he should have said *victory.* Tipping the goblet farther, the face vanished, replaced by an almost blinding—

A hand took the goblet away. "You don't need that truth yet," Aletheia said.

I drew in a breath. "Will I?"

She looked up at me, into me, smiling faintly. "You don't really want to know." Her hand touched mine as she handed back the goblet. "For the time you may, however."

I rewrapped it and put the box up in the cupboard. When I turned back around to thank her, Aletheia had vanished. ●

BRAKE

The roots of time are anchored in
a drift of sand that's drifting thin.
Leaves flash out, then fold and fall.
Ice covers all.

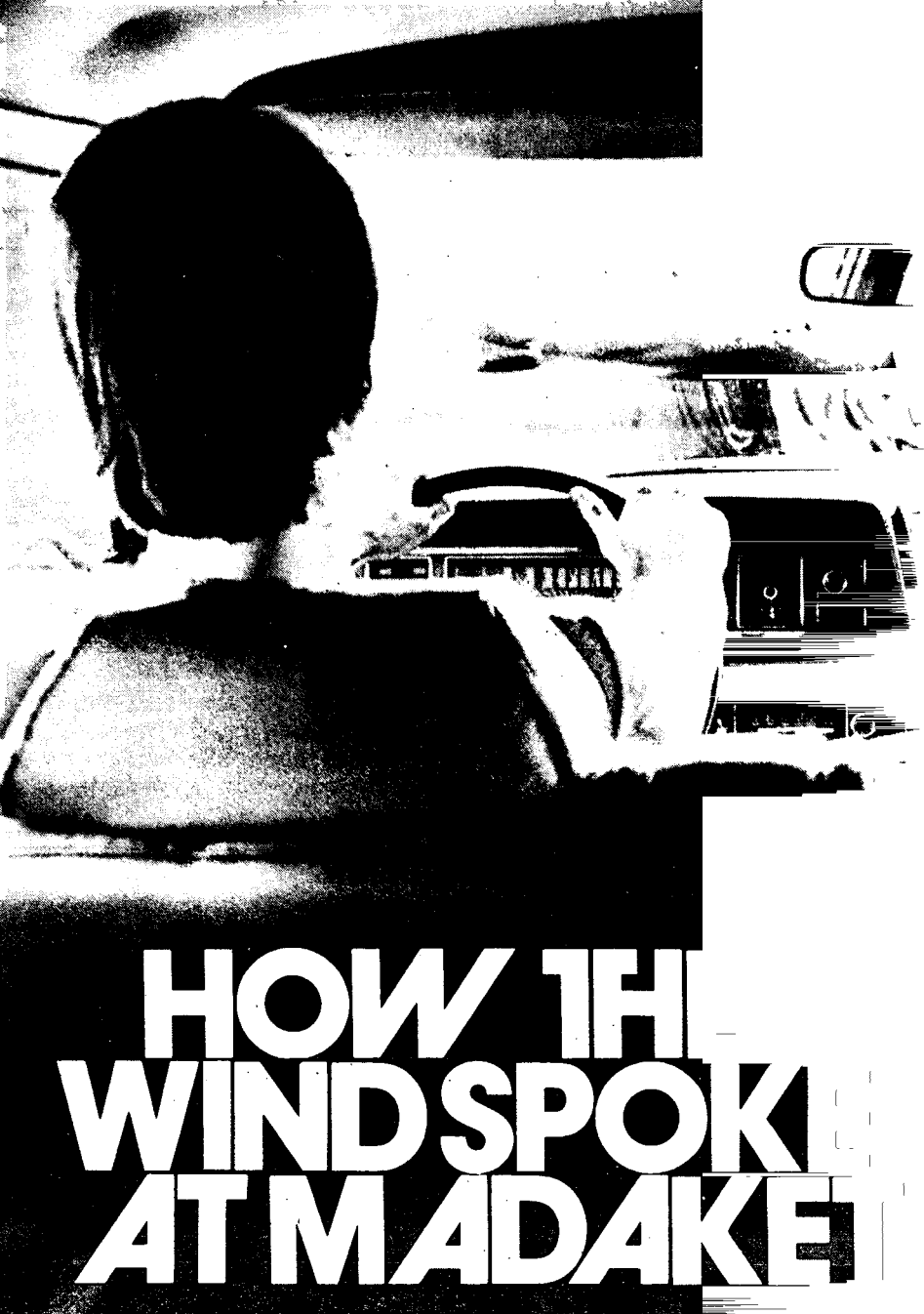
And the stars drop out of the sky,
and the sky is a few black scraps
shivering down forever to a missing floor.

And finally all is perfectly balanced,
huge and alike, as numb as loss.

But time's slopes have different grades,
the grass of time has many blades.
There are still many hills to climb,
and daybreak lawns as fresh as lime.

—Alex M. Jeffers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



HOW TH
WIND SPOK
AT MADAKE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by Lucius Shepard

This horror story is a bit of a departure from [illegible] usual fare, but we think you'll find it to [illegible] an exciting and thoroughly absorbing [illegible]e. Mr. Shepard says that by the time this story is published he'll be living in Nan[illegible]ucket. We hope the elements are kinder to [illegible] than they are to the characters here.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1

Softly at dawn, rustling dead leaves in the roof gutters, ticking the wires of the television antenna against the shingled wall, seething through the beach grasses, shifting the bare twigs of a hawthorn to claw at the tool-shed door, playfully flipping a peg off the clothesline, snuffling the garbage and tattering the plastic bags, creating a thousand nervous flutters, a thousand more shivery whispers, then building, keening in the window cracks and rattling the panes, smacking down a sheet of plyboard that has been leaning against the woodpile, swelling to a pour off the open sea, its howl articulated by throats of narrow streets and teeth of vacant houses, until you begin to imagine a huge invisible animal throwing back its head and roaring, and the cottage is creaking like the timbers of an old ship . . .

2

Waking at first light, Peter Ramey lay abed a while and listened to the wind; then, steeling himself against the cold, he threw off the covers, hurriedly pulled on jeans, tennis shoes, and a flannel shirt, and went into the front room to kindle a fire in the wood stove. Outside, the trees were silhouetted by a backdrop of slate clouds, but the sky wasn't yet bright enough to cast the shadow of the window frame across the picnic-style table beneath it; the other furniture—three chewed-up wicker chairs and a sofa bunk—hunched in their dark corners. The tinder caught, and soon the fire was snapping inside the stove. Still cold, Peter beat his arms against his shoulders and hopped from one foot to another, setting dishes and drawers to rattling. He was a pale, heavyset man of thirty-three, with ragged black hair and beard, so tall that he had to duck through the doors of the cottage; and because of his size he had never really settled into the place: he felt like a tramp who had appropriated a child's abandoned treehouse in which to spend the winter.

The kitchen was an alcove off the front room, and after easing the chill, his face stinging with heat, he lit the gas stove and started breakfast. He cut a hole in a slice of bread, laid it in the frying pan, then cracked an egg and poured it into the hole (usually he just opened cans and cereal boxes or heated frozen food, but Sara Tappinger, his current lover, had taught him to fix eggs this way, and it made him feel like a competent bachelor to keep up the practice). He shoveled down the egg and bread standing at the kitchen window, watching the gray-shingled houses across the street melt from the darkness, shadowy clumps resolving into thickets of bayberry and sheep's laurel, a picket-line of Japanese pines beyond them. The wind had dropped and it looked as if the clouds were going to hang around, which was fine by Peter. Since renting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the cottage in Madaket eight months before, he had learned that he thrived on bleakness, that the blustery, overcast days nourished his imagination. He had finished one novel here, and he planned to stay until the second was done. And maybe a third. What the hell? There wasn't much point in returning to California. He turned on the water to do the dishes, but the thought of LA had soured him on being competent. Screw it! Let the ants breed. He pulled on a sweater, stuffed a notebook in his pocket, and stepped out into the cold.

As if it had been waiting for him, a blast of wind came swerving around the corner of the cottage and numbed his face. He tucked his chin onto his chest and set out walking, turning left on Tennessee Avenue and heading toward Smith Point, past more gray-shingled houses with quarterboards bearing cutesy names above their doors: names like Sea Shanty and Tooth Acres (the vacation home of a New Jersey dentist). When he had arrived on Nantucket he'd been amused by the fact that almost every structure on the island, even the Sears Roebuck store, had gray shingles, and he had written his ex-wife a long, humorous, let's-be-friends letter telling about the shingles, about all the odd characters and quirkiness of the place. His ex-wife had not answered, and Peter couldn't blame her, not after what he had done. Solitude was the reason he gave for having moved to Madaket, but while this was superficially true, it would have been more accurate to say that he had been fleeing the ruins of his life. He had been idling along, content with his marriage, churning out scripts for a PBS children's show, when he had fallen obsessively in love with another woman, herself married. Plans and promises had been made, as a result of which he had left his wife; but then, in a sudden reversal of form, the woman—who had never expressed any sentiment other than boredom and resentment concerning her husband—had decided to honor her vows, leaving Peter alone and feeling both a damned fool and a villain. Desperate, he had fought for her, failed, tried to hate her, failed, and finally, hoping a change of geography would provoke a change of heart—hers or his—he had come to Madaket. That had been in September, directly after the exodus of the summer tourists; it was now May, and though the cold weather still lingered, the tourists were beginning to filter back. But no hearts had changed.

Twenty minutes of brisk walking brought him to the top of a dune overlooking Smith Point, a jut of sand extending a hundred yards or so into the water, with three small islands strung out beyond it; the nearest of these had been separated from the point during a hurricane, and had it still been attached, it—in conjunction with Eel Point, some three-quarters of a mile distant—would have given the western end of the island the shape of a crab's claw. Far out at sea a ray of sunlight pierced the overcast and dazzled the water beneath to such brilliance that it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked like a laving of fresh white paint. Seagulls made curving flights overhead, hovered and dropped scallops onto the gravelly shingle to break the shells, then swooped down to pluck the meat. Sad-vowelled gusts of wind sprayed a fine grit through the air.

Peter sat in the lee of a dune, choosing a spot from which he could see the ocean between stalks of the pale green beach grass, and opened his notebook. The words HOW THE WIND SPOKE AT MADAKET were printed on the inside cover. He had no illusions that the publishers would keep the title; they would change it to *The Keening* or *The Huffing and Puffing*, package it with a garish cover and stick it next to *Love's Tormenting Itch* by Wanda LaFontaine on the grocery store racks. But none of that mattered as long as the words were good, and they were, though it hadn't gone well at first, not until he had started walking each morning to Smith Point and writing long-hand. Then everything had snapped into focus. He had realized that it was *his* story he wanted to tell—the woman, his loneliness, his psychic flashes, the resolution of his character—all wrapped in the eerie metaphor of the wind; the writing had flowed so easily that it seemed the wind was collaborating on the book, whispering in his ear and guiding his hand across the page. He flipped the pages and noticed a paragraph that was a bit too formal, that he should break up and seed throughout the story:

"Sadler had spent much of his life in Los Angeles, where the sounds of nature were obscured, and to his mind the constancy of the wind was Nantucket's most remarkable feature. Morning, noon and night it flowed across the island, giving him a sense of being a bottom-dweller in an ocean of air, buffeted by currents that sprang from exotic quarters of the globe. He was a lonely soul, and the wind served to articulate his loneliness, to point up the immensity of the world in which he had become isolated; over the months he had come to feel an affinity with it, to consider it a fellow-traveler through emptiness and time. He half-believed its vague, speechlike utterances to be exactly that—an oracular voice whose powers of speech were not yet fully developed—and from listening to them he derived an impression of impending strangeness. He did not discount the impression, because as far back as he could recall he had received similar ones, and most had been borne out by reality. It was no great prophetic gift, no foreshadowings of earthquakes or assassinations; rather, it was a low-grade psychic ability: flashes of vision often accompanied by queasiness and headaches. Sometimes he could touch an object and know something about its owner, sometimes he would glimpse the shape of an upcoming event. But these premonitions were never clear enough to do him any good, to prevent broken arms or—as he had lately discovered —emotional disaster. Still, he hearkened to them. And now he thought the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wind might actually be trying to tell him something of his future, of a new factor about to complicate his existence, for whenever he staked himself out on the dune at Smith Point he would feel . . ."

Gooseflesh pebbling his skin, nausea, an eddying sensation behind his forehead as if his thoughts were spinning out of control. Peter rested his head on his knees and took deep breaths until the spell had abated. It was happening more and more often, and while it was most likely a product of suggestibility, a side-effect of writing such a personal story, he couldn't shake the notion that he had become involved in some Twilight Zone irony, that the story was coming true as he wrote it. He hoped not: it wasn't going to be a very pleasant story. When the last of his nausea had passed, he took out a blue felt-tip, turned to a clean page and began to detail the unpleasantness.

Two hours and fifteen pages later, hands stiff with cold, he heard a voice hailing him. Sara Tappinger was struggling up the side of the dune from the blacktop, slipping in the soft sand. She was, he thought with a degree of self-satisfaction, a damned pretty woman. Thirtyish; long auburn hair and nice cheekbones; endowed with what one of Peter's islander acquaintances called "big chest problems." That same acquaintance had congratulated him for having scored with Sara, saying that she'd blue-balled half the men on the island after her divorce, and wasn't he the lucky son of a bitch. Peter supposed he *was*: Sara was witty, bright, independent (she ran the local Montessori school), and they were compatible in every way. Yet it was not a towering passion. It was friendly, comfortable, and this Peter found alarming. Although being with her only glossed over his loneliness, he had come to depend on the relationship, and he was concerned that this signalled an overall reduction of his expectations, and that this in turn signalled the onset of middle-age, a state for which he was unprepared.

"Hi," she said, flinging herself down beside him and planting a kiss on his cheek. "Wanna play?"

"Why aren't you in school?"

"It's Friday. I told you, remember? Parent-teacher conferences." She took his hand. "You're cold as ice! How long have you been here?"

"Couple of hours."

"You're insane." She laughed, delighted by his insanity. "I was watching you for a bit before I called. With your hair flying about, you looked like a mad Bolshevik hatching a plot."

"Actually," he said, adopting a Russian accent, "I come here to make contact with our submarines."

"Oh? What's up? An invasion?"

"Not exactly. You see, in Russia we have many shortages. Grain, high

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

technology, blue jeans. But the Russian soul can fly above such hardships. There is, however, a shortage of one commodity that we must solve immediately, and this is why I have lured you here."

She pretended bewilderment. "You need school administrators?"

"No, no. It is more serious. I believe the American word for it is . . ." He caught her by the shoulders and pushed her down on the sand, pinning her beneath him. "Poontang. We cannot do without."

Her smile faltered, then faded to a look of rapt anticipation. He kissed her. Through her coat he felt the softness of her breasts. The wind ruffled his hair, and he had the idea that it was leaning over his shoulder, spying on them; he broke off the kiss. He was queasy again. Dizzy.

"You're sweating," she said, dabbing at his brow with a gloved hand. "Is this one of those spells?"

He nodded and lay back against the dune.

"What do you see?" She continued to pat his brow dry, a concerned frown etching delicate lines at the corners of her mouth.

"Nothing," he said.

But he did see something. Something glinting behind a cloudy surface. Something that attracted him yet frightened him at the same time. Something he knew would soon fall to his hand.

Though nobody realized it at the time, the first sign of trouble was the disappearance of Ellen Borchard, age thirteen, on the evening of Tuesday, May nineteenth—an event Peter had written into his book just prior to Sara's visit on Friday morning; but it didn't really begin for him until Friday night while drinking at the Atlantic Cafe in the village of Nantucket. He had gone there with Sara for dinner, and since the restaurant section was filled to capacity, they had opted for drinks and sandwiches at the bar. They had hardly settled on their stools when Jerry Highsmith—a blond young man who conducted bicycle tours of the island (". . . the self-proclaimed Hunk of Hunks," was Sara's description of him)—latched onto Peter; he was a regular at the cafe and an aspiring writer, and he took every opportunity to get Peter's advice. As always Peter offered encouragement, but he secretly felt that anyone who liked to do their drinking at the Atlantic could have little to say to the reading public: it was a typical New England tourist trap, decorated with brass barometers and old life preservers, and it catered to the young summer crowd, many of whom—evident by their Bahama tans—were packed around the bar. Soon Jerry moved off in pursuit of a redhead with a honeysuckle drawl, a member of his latest tour group, and his stool was taken by Mills Lindstrom, a retired fisherman and a neighbor of Peter's.

"Damn wind out there's sharp enough to carve bone," said Mills by way of a greeting, and ordered a whiskey. He was a big red-faced man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stuffed into overalls and a Levi jacket; white curls spilled from under his cap, and a lacing of broken blood vessels webbed his cheeks. The lacing was more prominent than usual, because Mills had a load on.

"What are you doing here?" Peter was surprised that Mills would set foot in the cafe; it was his conviction that tourism was a deadly pollution, and places like the Atlantic were its mutant growths.

"Took the boat out today. First time in two months." Mills knocked back half his whiskey. "Thought I might set a few lines, but then I run into that thing off Smith Point. Didn't feel like fishin' anymore." He emptied his glass and signalled for a refill. "Carl Keating told me it was formin' out there a while back. Guess it slipped my mind."

"What thing?" asked Peter.

Mills sipped at his second whiskey. "Off-shore pollution aggregate," he said grimly. "That's the fancy name, but basically it's a garbage dump. Must be pretty near a kilometer square of water covered in garbage. Oil slick, plastic bottles, driftwood. They collect at slack points in the tides, but not usually so close to land. This one ain't more'n fifteen miles off the point."

Peter was intrigued. "You're talking about something like the Sargasso Sea, right?"

"'Spose so. 'Cept these ain't so big and there ain't no seaweed."

"Are they permanent?"

"This one's new, the one off Smith Point. But there's one about thirty miles off the Vineyard that's been there for some years. Big storm'll break it up, but it'll always come back." Mills patted his pockets, trying unsuccessfully to find his pipe. "Ocean's gettin' like a stagnant pond. Gettin' to where a man throws in a line and more'n likely he'll come up with an ol' boot 'stead of a fish. I 'member twenty years ago when the mackerel was runnin', there'd be so many fish the water would look black for miles. Now you spot a patch of dark water and you know some damn tanker's taken a shit!"

Sara, who had been talking to a friend, put her arm around Peter's shoulder and asked what was up; after Peter had explained she gave a dramatic shudder and said, "It sounds spooky to me." She affected a sepulchral tone. "Strange magnetic zones that lure sailors to their dooms."

"Spooky!" Mills scoffed. "You got better sense than that, Sara. Spooky!" The more he considered the comment, the madder he became. He stood and made a flailing gesture that spilled the drink of a tanned college-age kid behind him; he ignored the kid's complaint and glared at Sara. "Maybe you think this place is spooky. It's the same damn thing! A garbage dump! 'Cept here the garbage walks and talks"—he turned his glare on the kid—"and thinks it owns the goddamn world!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Shit," said Peter, watching Mills shoulder his way through the crowd. "I was going to ask him to take me to see it."

"Ask him tomorrow," said Sara. "Though I don't know why you'd want to see it." She grinned and held up her hands to ward off his explanation. "Sorry. I should realize that anyone who'll spend all day staring at seagulls would find a square kilometer of garbage downright erotic."

He made a grab for her breasts. "I'll show you erotic!"

She laughed and caught his hand and—her mood suddenly altered—brushed the knuckles against his lips. "Show me later," she said.

They had a few more drinks, talked about Peter's work, about Sara's, and discussed the idea of taking a weekend together in New York. Peter began to acquire a glow. It was partly the drinks, yet he realized that Sara, too, was responsible. Though there had been other women since he had left his wife, he had scarcely noticed them; he had tried to be honest with them, had explained that he was in love with someone else, but he had learned that this was simply a sly form of dishonesty, that when you went to bed with someone—no matter how frank you had been as to your emotional state—they would refuse to believe there was any impediment to commitment that their love could not overcome; and so, in effect, he had used those women. But he did notice Sara, he did appreciate her, and he had not told her about the woman back in LA: once he had thought this a lie, but now he was beginning to suspect it was a sign that the passion was over. He had been in love for such a long time with a woman absent from him that perhaps he had grown to believe absence was a precondition for intensity, and perhaps it was causing him to overlook the birth of a far more realistic yet equally intense passion closer at hand. He studied Sara's face as she rambled on about New York. Beautiful. The kind of beauty that sneaks up on you, that you assumed was mere prettiness. But then, noticing her mouth was a bit too full, you decided that she was interestingly pretty; and then, noticing the energy of the face, how her eyes widened when she talked, how expressive her mouth was, you were led feature by feature to a perception of her beauty. Oh, he noticed her all right. The trouble was that during those months of loneliness *(Months? Christ, it had been over a year!)* he had become distanced from his emotions; he had set up surveillance systems inside his soul, and every time he started to twitch one way or the other, instead of completing the action he analyzed it and thus aborted it. He doubted he would ever be able to lose himself again.

Sara glanced questioningly at someone behind him. Hugh Weldon, the chief of police. He nodded at them and settled onto the stool. "Sara," he said. "Mr. Ramey. Glad I caught you."

Weldon always struck Peter as the archetypal New Englander. Gaunt;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weatherbeaten; dour. His basic expression was so bleak you assumed his gray crewcut to have been an act of penance. He was in his fifties but had a habit of sucking at his teeth that made him seem ten years older. Usually Peter found him amusing; however, on this occasion he experienced nausea and a sense of unease, feelings he recognized as the onset of a premonitory spell.

After exchanging pleasantries with Sara, Weldon turned to Peter. "Don't want you to go takin' this wrong, Mr. Ramey. But I got to ask where you were last Tuesday evenin' 'round six o'clock."

The feelings were growing stronger, evolving into a sluggish panic that roiled inside Peter like the effects of a bad drug. "Tuesday," he said. "That's when the Borchard girl disappeared."

"My God, Hugh," said Sara testily. "What is this? Roust out the bearded stranger every time somebody's kid runs away? You know damn well that's what Ellen did. I'd run away myself if Ethan Borchard was my father."

"Mebbe." Weldon favored Peter with a neutral stare. "Did you happen to see Ellen last Tuesday, Mr. Ramey?"

"I was home," said Peter, barely able to speak. Sweat was popping out on his forehead, all over his body, and he knew he must look as guilty as hell; but that didn't matter, because he could almost see what was going to happen. He was sitting somewhere, and just out of reach below him something glinted.

"Then you musta seen her," said Weldon. " 'Cordin' to witnesses she was mopin' 'round your woodpile for pretty near an hour. Wearin' bright yellow. Be hard to miss that."

"No," said Peter. He was reaching for that glint, and he knew it was going to be bad in any case, very bad, but it would be even worse if he touched it and he couldn't stop himself.

"Now that don't make sense," said Weldon from a long way off. "That cottage of yours is so small, it 'pears to me a man would just naturally catch sight of somethin' like a girl standin' by his woodpile while he was movin' 'round. Six o'clock's dinnertime for most folks, and you got a nice view of the woodpile out your kitchen window."

"I didn't see her." The spell was starting to fade, and Peter was terribly dizzy.

"Don't see how that's possible." Weldon sucked at his teeth, and the glutinous sound caused Peter's stomach to do a slow flip-flop.

"You ever stop to think, Hugh," said Sara angrily, "that maybe he was otherwise occupied?"

"You know somethin', Sara, why don't you say it plain?"

"I was with him last Tuesday. He was moving around, all right, but he wasn't looking out any window. Is that plain enough?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Weldon sucked at his teeth again. "I 'spect it is. You sure 'bout this?"

Sara gave a sarcastic laugh. "Wanna see my hickey?"

"No reason to be snitty, Sara. I ain't doin' this for pleasure." Weldon heaved to his feet and gazed down at Peter. "You lookin' a bit peaked, Mr. Ramey. Hope it ain't somethin' you ate." He held the stare a moment longer, then pushed off through the crowd.

"God, Peter!" Sara cupped his face in her hands. "You look awful!"

"Dizzy," he said, fumbling for his wallet; he tossed some bills on the counter. "C'mon, I need some air."

With Sara guiding him, he made it through the front door and leaned on the hood of a parked car, head down, gulping in the cold air. Her arm around his shoulders was a good weight that helped steady him, and after a few seconds he began to feel stronger, able to lift his head. The street—with its cobblestones and newly budded trees and old-fashioned lamp posts and tiny shops—looked like a prop for a model railroad. Wind prowled the sidewalks, spinning paper cups and fluttering awnings. A strong gust shivered him and brought a flashback of dizziness and vision. Once more he was reaching down toward that glint, only this time it was very close, so close that its energies were tingling his fingertips, pulling at him, and if he could just stretch out his hand another inch or two . . . Dizziness overwhelmed him. He caught himself on the hood of the car; his arm gave way, and he slumped forward, feeling the cold metal against his cheek. Sara was calling to someone, asking for help, and he wanted to reassure her, to say he'd be all right in a minute, but the words clogged in his throat and he continued lying there, watching the world tip and spin, until someone with arms stronger than Sara's lifted him and said, "Hey, man! You better stop hittin' the sauce or I might be tempted to snake your ol' lady."

Streetlight angled a rectangle of yellow glare across the foot of Sara's bed, illuminating her stockinged legs and half of Peter's bulk beneath the covers. She lit a cigarette, then—exasperated at having given into the habit again—she stubbed it out, turned on her side and lay watching the rise and fall of Peter's chest. Dead to the world. Why, she wondered, was she such a sucker for the damaged ones? She laughed at herself; she knew the answer. She wanted to be the one to make them forget whatever had hurt them, usually another woman. A combination Florence Nightingale and sex therapist, that was her, and she could never resist a new challenge. Though Peter had not talked about it, she could tell some LA ghost owned half his heart. He had all the symptoms. Sudden silences, distracted stares, the way he jumped for the mailbox as soon as the postman came and yet was always disappointed by what he had received. She believed that she owned the other half of his heart, but whenever

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he started to go with it, to forget the past and immerse himself in the here and now, the ghost would rear up and he'd create a little distance. His approach to lovemaking, for instance. He'd come on soft and gentle, and then, just as they were on the verge of a new level of intimacy, he'd draw back, crack a joke or do something rough—like tackling her on the beach that morning—and she would feel cheap and sluttish. Sometimes she thought that the thing to do would be to tell him to get the hell out of her life, to come back and see her when his head was clear. But she knew she wouldn't. He owned more than half her heart.

She eased off the bed, careful not to wake him, and slipped out of her clothes. A branch scraped the window, startling her, and she held her blouse up to cover her breasts. Oh, right! A Peeping Tom at a third-floor window. In New York, maybe, but not in Nantucket. She tossed the blouse into the laundry hamper and caught sight of herself in the full-length mirror affixed to the closet door. In the dim light the reflection looked elongated and unfamiliar, and she had a feeling that Peter's ghost woman was watching her from across the continent, from another mirror. She could almost make her out. Tall, long-legged, a mournful expression. Sara didn't need to see her to know the woman had been sad: it was the sad ones who were the real heartbreakers, and the men whose hearts they had broken were like fossil records of what the women were. They offered their sadness to be cured, yet it wasn't a cure they wanted, only another reason for sadness, a spicy bit to mix in with the stew they had been stirring all their lives. Sara moved closer to the mirror, and the illusion of the other woman was replaced by the conformation of her own body. "That's what I'm going to do to you, lady," she whispered. "Blot you out." The words sounded empty.

She turned back the bedspread and slid in beside Peter. He made a muffled noise, and she saw gleams of the streetlights in his eyes. "Sorry about earlier," he said.

"No problem," she said brightly. "I got Bob Frazier and Jerry Highsmith to help bring you home. Do you remember?"

"Vaguely. I'm surprised Jerry could tear himself away from his redhead. Sweet Ginger!" He lifted his arm so Sara could burrow in against his shoulder. "I guess your reputation's ruined."

"I don't know about that, but it's certainly getting more exotic all the time."

He laughed.

"Peter?" she said.

"Yeah?"

"I'm worried about these spells of yours. That's what this was, wasn't it?"

"Yeah." He was silent a moment. "I'm worried, too. I've been having

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them two and three times a day, and that's never happened before. But there's nothing I can do except try not to think about them."

"Can you see what's going to happen?"

"Not really, and there's no point in trying to figure it out. I can't ever use what I see. It just happens, whatever's going to, and then I understand that *that* was what the premonition was about. It's a pretty worthless gift."

Sara snuggled closer, throwing her leg across his hip. "Why don't we go over to the Cape tomorrow?"

"I was going to check out Mills' garbage dump."

"Okay. We can do that in the morning and still catch the three o'clock boat. It might be good for you to get off the island for a day or so."

"All right. Maybe that's not such a bad idea."

Sara shifted her leg and realized that he was erect. She eased her hand beneath the covers to touch him, and he turned so as to allow her better access. His breath quickened and he kissed her—gentle, treasuring kisses on her lips, her throat, her eyes—and his hips moved in counterpoint to the rhythm of her hand, slowly at first, becoming insistent, convulsive, until he was prodding against her thigh and she had to take her hand away and let him slip between her legs, opening her. Her thoughts were dissolving into a medium of urgency, her consciousness being reduced to an awareness of heat and shadows. But when he lifted himself above her, that brief separation broke the spell, and she could suddenly hear the fretful sounds of the wind, could see the particulars of his face and the light fixture on the ceiling behind him. His features seemed to sharpen, to grow alert, and he opened his mouth to speak. She put a finger to his lips. *Please, Peter! No jokes. This is serious.* She beamed the thoughts at him, and maybe they sank in. His face slackened, and as she guided him into place he moaned, a despairing sound such as a ghost might make at the end of its earthly term; and then she was clawing at him, driving him deeper inside, and talking to him, not words, just breathy noises, sighs and whispers, but having meanings that he would understand.

3

That same night while Peter and Sara were asleep, Sally McColl was driving her jeep along the blacktop that led to Smith Point. She was drunk and not giving a good goddamn where she wandered, steering in a never-ending S, sending the headlights veering across low gorsey hills and gnarled hawthorns. With one hand she kept a chokehold on a pint of cherry brandy, her third of the evening. 'Sconset Sally, they called her. Crazy Sally. Seventy-four years old and still able to shell scallops

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and row better than most men on the island. Wrapped in a couple of Salvation Army dresses, two moth-eaten sweaters, a tweed jacket gone at the elbows, and generally looking like a bag lady from hell. Brambles of white hair sticking out from under a battered fisherman's hat. Static fizzled on the radio, and Sally accompanied it with mutters, curses, and fitful bursts of song, all things that echoed the jumble of her thoughts. She parked near the spot where the blacktop gave out, staggered from the jeep and stumped through the soft sand to the top of a dune. There she swayed for a moment, dizzied by the pour of wind and the sweep of darkness broken only by a few stars on the horizon. "Whoo-ooh!" she screeched; the wind sucked up her yell and added it to its sound. She lurched forward, slipped and went rolling down the face of the dune. Sand adhering to her tongue, spitting, she sat up and found that somehow she'd managed to hold onto the bottle, that the cap was still on even though she hadn't screwed it tight. A flicker of paranoia set her to jerking her head from side-to-side. She didn't want anybody spying on her, spreading more stories about old drunk Sally. The ones they told were bad enough. Half were lies, and the rest were slanted to make her seem loopy . . . like the one about how she'd bought herself a mail-order husband and he'd run off after two weeks, stowed away on a boat, scared to death of her, and she had come riding on horseback through Nantucket, hoping to bring him home. A swarthy little bump of a man, Eye-talian, no English, and he hadn't known shit from shortcake in bed. Better to do yourself than fool with a pimple like him. All she'd wanted had been the goddamn trousers she'd dressed him in, and the tale-tellers had cast her as a desperate woman. Bastards! Buncha goddamn . . .

Sally's train of thought pulled into a tunnel, and she sat staring blankly at the dark. Damn cold, it was, and windy a bit as well. She took a swig of brandy; when it hit bottom she felt ten degrees warmer. Another swig put her legs under her, and she started walking along the beach away from the point, searching for a nice lonesome spot where nobody was likely to happen by. That was what she wanted. Just to sit and spit and feel the night on her skin. You couldn't hardly find such a place nowadays, what with all the summer trash floating in from the mainland, the Gucci-Pucci sissies and the little swish-tailed chick-women eager to bend over and butter their behinds for the first five-hundred-dollar suit that showed interest, probably some fat boy junior executive who couldn't get it up and would marry 'em just for the privilege of being humiliated every night . . . That train of thought went spiraling off, and Sally spiraled after it. She sat down with a thump. She gave out with a cackle, liked the sound of it, and cackled louder. She sipped at the brandy, wishing that she had brought another bottle, letting her thoughts subside into a crackle of half-formed images and memories that seemed to have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been urged upon her by the thrashings and skitterings of the wind. As her eyes adjusted, she made out a couple of houses lumped against the lesser blackness of the sky. Vacant summer places. No, wait! Those were them whatchamacallems. Condominiums. What had that Ramey boy said about 'em? Iniums with a condom slipped over each. Prophylactic lives. He was a good boy, that Peter. The first person she'd met with the gift for dog's years, and it was strong in him, stronger than her gift, which wasn't good for much except for guessing the weather, and she was so old now that her bones could do that just as well. He'd told her how some people in California had blown up condominiums to protect the beauty of their coastline, and it had struck her as a fine idea. The thought of condominiums ringing the island caused her to tear up, and with a burst of drunken nostalgia she remembered what a wonder the sea had been when she was a girl. Clean, pure, rife with spirits. She'd been able to sense those spirits . . .

Battering and crunching from somewhere off in the dunes. She staggered to her feet, cocking an ear. More sounds of breakage. She headed toward them, toward the condominiums. Might be some kids vandalizing the place. If so, she'd cheer 'em on. But as she climbed to the top of the nearest dune, the sounds died away. Then the wind picked up, not howling or roaring, but with a weird ululation, almost a melody, as if it were pouring through the holes of an enormous flute.

The back of Sally's neck prickled, and a cold slimy worm of fear wriggled the length of her spine. She was close enough to the condominiums to see their rooflines against the sky, but she could see nothing else. There was only the eerie music of the wind, repeating the same passage of five notes over and over. Then it, too, died. Sally took a slug of brandy, screwed up her courage, and started walking again; the beach grass swayed and tickled her hands, and the tickling spread gooseflesh up her arms. About twenty feet from the first condominium she stopped, her heartbeat ragged. Fear was turning the brandy to a sour mess in her stomach. What was there to be afraid of, she asked herself. The wind? Shit! She had another slug of brandy and went forward. It was so dark she had to grope her way along the wall, and she was startled to find a hole smack in the middle of it. Bigger than a damn door, it was. Edged by broken boards and ripped shingles. Like a giant fist had smashed it through. Her mouth was cottony, but she stepped inside. She rummaged in her pockets, dug out a box of kitchen matches, lit one and cupped it with her hands until it burned steadily. The room was unfurnished, just carpeting and telephone fixtures and paint-spattered newspapers and rags. Sliding glass doors were inset into the opposite wall, but most of the glass had been blown out, crunching under her feet; as she drew near, an icicle-shaped piece hanging from the frame caught the glow of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the match and for a second was etched on the dark like a fiery tooth. The match scorched her fingers. She dropped it and lit another and moved into the next room. More holes and a heaviness in the air, as if the house were holding its breath. Nerves, she thought. Goddamn old-woman nerves. Maybe it *had* been kids, drunk and ramming a car into the walls. A breeze eeled from somewhere and puffed out the match. She lit a third one. The breeze extinguished it, too, and she realized that kids hadn't been responsible for the damage, because the breeze didn't blow away this time: it fluttered around her, lifting her dress, her hair, twining about her legs, patting and frisking her all over, and in the breeze was a feeling, a knowledge, that turned her bones to splinters of black ice. Something had come from the sea, some evil thing with the wind for a body had smashed holes in the walls to play its foul, spine-chilling music, and it was surrounding her, toying with her, getting ready to whirl her off to hell and gone. It had a clammy, bitter smell, and that smell clung to her skin everywhere it touched.

Sally backed into the first room, wanting to scream but only able to manage a feeble squawk. The wind flowed after her, lifting the newspapers and flapping them at her like crinkly white bats, matting them against her face and chest. Then she screamed. She dove for the hole in the wall and flung herself into a frenzied, heart-busting run, stumbling, falling, scrambling to her feet and waving her arms and yelling. Behind her, the wind gushed from the house, roaring, and she imagined it shaping itself into a towering figure, a black demon who was laughing at her, letting her think she might make it before swooping down and tearing her apart. She rolled down the face of the last dune, and, her breath sobbing, clawed at the door handle of the jeep; she jiggled the key in the ignition, prayed until the engine turned over, and then, gears grinding, swerved off along the Nantucket road.

She was halfway to 'Sconset before she grew calm enough to think what to do, and the first thing she decided was to drive straight to Nantucket and tell Hugh Weldon. Though God only knew what *he'd* do. Or what he'd say. That scrawny flint of a man! Like as not he'd laugh in her face and be off to share the latest 'Sconset Sally story with his cronies. No, she told herself. There weren't going to be anymore stories about ol' Sally drunk as the moon and seeing ghosts and raving about the wind. They wouldn't believe her, so let 'em think kids had done it. A little sun of gleeful viciousness rose in her thoughts, burning away the shadows of her fear and heating her blood even quicker than would a jolt of cherry brandy. Let it happen, whatever was going to happen, and *then* she'd tell her story, *then* she'd say I would have told you sooner, but you would have called me crazy. Oh, no! She wouldn't be the butt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of their jokes this time. Let 'em find out for themselves that some new devil had come from the sea.

4

Mills Lindstrom's boat was a Boston whaler, about twenty feet of blue squarish hull with a couple of bucket seats, a control pylon, and a fifty-five horsepower outboard racketing behind. Sara had to sit on Peter's lap, and while he wouldn't have minded that in any case, in this case he appreciated the extra warmth. Though it was calm, the sea rolling in long swells, heavy clouds and a cold front had settled over the island; farther out the sun was breaking through, but all around them crumbling banks of whitish mist hung close to the water. The gloom couldn't dampen Peter's mood, however; he was anticipating a pleasant weekend with Sara and gave hardly a thought to their destination, carrying on a steady stream of chatter. Mills, on the other hand, was brooding and taciturn, and when they came in sight of the off-shore pollution aggregate, a dirty brown stain spreading for hundreds of yards across the water, he pulled his pipe from beneath his rain gear and set to chomping the stem, as if to restrain impassioned speech.

Peter borrowed Mills' binoculars and peered ahead. The suface of the aggregate was pocked by thousands of white objects; at this distance they looked like bones sticking up from thin soil. Streamers of mist were woven across it, and the edge was shifting sluggishly, an obscene cap sliding over the dome of a swell. It was a no-man's land, an ugly blot, and as they drew near, its ugliness increased. The most common of the white objects were Clorox bottles such as fishermen used to mark the spread of their nets; there were also a great many fluorescent tubes, other plastic debris, torn pieces of netting, and driftwood, all mired in a pale brown jelly of decayed oil products. It was a Golgotha of the inorganic world, a plain of ultimate spiritual malaise, of entropy triumphant, and perhaps, thought Peter, the entire earth would one day come to resemble it. The briny, bitter stench made his skin crawl.

"God," said Sara as they began cruising along the edge; she opened her mouth to say more but couldn't find the words.

"I see why you felt like drinking last night," said Peter to Mills, who just shook his head and grunted.

"Can we go into it?" asked Sara.

"All them torn nets'll foul the propeller." Mills stared at her askance. "Ain't it bad enough from out here?"

"We can tip up the motor and row in," Peter suggested. "Come on, Mills. It'll be like landing on the moon."

And, indeed, as they rowed into the aggregate, cutting through the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pale brown stuff, Peter felt that they had crossed some intangible border into uncharted territory. The air seemed heavier, full of suppressed energy, and the silence seemed deeper; the only sound was the slosh of the oars. Mills had told Peter that the thing would have roughly a spiral shape, due to the actions of opposing currents, and that intensified his feeling of having entered the unknown; he pictured them as characters in a fantasy novel, creeping across a great device inlaid on the floor of an abandoned temple. Debris bobbed against the hull. The brown glop had the consistency of Jello that hadn't set properly, and when Peter dipped his hand into it, beads accumulated on his fingers. Some of the textures on the surface had a horrid, almost organic beauty: bleached, wormlike tendrils of netting mired in the slick, reminding Peter of some animal's diseased spoor; larval chips of wood matted on a bed of glistening cellophane; a blue plastic lid bearing a girl's sunbonneted face embedded in a spaghetti of styrofoam strips. They would point out such oddities to each other, but nobody was eager to talk. The desolation of the aggregate was oppressive, and not even a ray of sunlight fingering the boat, as if a searchlight were keeping track of them from the real world, not even that could dispell the gloom. Then, about two hundred yards in, Peter saw something shiny inside an opaque plastic container, reached down and picked it up.

The instant he brought it on board he realized that this was the object about which he had experienced the premonition, and he had the urge to throw it back; but he felt such a powerful attraction to it that instead he removed the lid and lifted out a pair of silver combs, the sort Spanish women wear in their hair. Touching them, he had a vivid mental image of a young woman's face: a pale, drawn face that might have been beautiful but was starved-thin and worn by sorrows. Gabriela. The name seeped into his consciousness the way a pawtrack frozen in the ground melts up from beneath the snow during a thaw. Gabriela Pa . . . Pasco . . . Pascual. His finger traced the design etched on the combs, and every curlicue conveyed a sense of her personality. Sadness, loneliness, and—most of all—terror. She'd been afraid for a very long time. Sara asked to see the combs, took them, and his ghostly impression of Gabriela Pascual's life flew apart like a creature of foam, leaving him disoriented.

"They're beautiful," said Sara. "And they must be really old."

"Looks like Mexican work," said Mills. "Hmph. What we got here?" He stretched out his oar, trying to snag something; he hauled the oar back in and Sara lifted the thing from the blade: a rag showing yellow streaks through its coating of slick.

"It's a blouse." Sara turned it in her hands, her nose wrinkling at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

having to touch the slick; she stopped turning it and stared at Peter. "Oh, God! It's Ellen Borchard's."

Peter took it from her. Beneath the manufacturer's label was Ellen Borchard's name tag. He closed his eyes, hoping to read some impression as he had with the silver combs. Nothing. His gift had deserted him. But he had a bad feeling that he knew exactly what had happened to the girl.

"Better take that to Hugh Weldon," said Mills. "Might . . ." He broke off and stared out over the aggregate.

At first Peter didn't see what had caught Mills' eye; then he noticed that a wind had sprung up. A most peculiar wind. It was moving slowly around the boat about fifty feet away, its path evident by the agitation of the debris over which it passed; it whispered and sighed, and with a sucking noise a couple of Clorox bottles popped out of the slick and spun into the air. Each time the wind made a complete circuit of the boat, it seemed to have grown a little stronger.

"What the hell!" Mills' face was drained of color, the web of broken blood vessels on his cheeks showing like a bright red tattoo.

Sara's nails bit into Peter's arm, and he was overwhelmed by the knowledge that this wind was what he had been warned against. Panicked, he shook Sara off, scrambled to the back of the boat and tipped down the outboard motor.

"The nets . . ." Mills began.

"Fuck the nets! Let's get out of here!"

The wind was keening, and the entire surface of the aggregate was starting to heave. Crouched in the stern, Peter was again struck by its resemblance to a graveyard with bones sticking out of the earth, only now all the bones were wiggling, working themselves loose. Some of the Clorox bottles were rolling sluggishly along, bouncing high when they hit an obstruction. The sight froze him for a moment, but as Mills fired the engine he crawled back to his seat and pulled Sara down with him. Mills turned the boat toward Madaket. The slick glubbed and smacked against the hull, and brown flecks splashed onto the windshield and oozed sideways. With each passing second the wind grew stronger and louder, building to a howl that drowned out the motor. A fluorescent tube went twirling up beside them like a cheerleader's baton; bottles and cellophane and splatters of oil slick flew at them from every direction. Sara ducked her face into Peter's shoulder, and he held her tight, praying that the propeller wouldn't foul. Mills swerved the boat to avoid a piece of driftwood that sailed past the bow, and then they were into clear water, out of the wind—though they could still hear it raging—and running down the long slope of a swell.

Relieved, Peter stroked Sara's hair and let out a shuddering breath;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but when he glanced behind them all his relief went glimmering. Thousands upon thousands of Clorox bottles and fluorescent tubes and other debris were spinning in mid-air above the aggregate—an insane mobile posed against the gray sky—and just beyond the edge narrow tracks of water were being lashed up, as if a windy knife were slicing back and forth across it, undecided whether or not to follow them home.

Hugh Weldon had been out in Madaket investigating the vandalism of the condominiums, and after receiving the radio call it had only taken him a few minutes to get to Peter's cottage. He sat beside Mills at the picnic table, listening to their story, and from the perspective of the sofa bunk, where Peter was sitting, his arm around Sara, the chief presented an angular, mantislike silhouette against the gray light from the window; the squabbling of the police radio outside seemed part of his persona, a radiation emanating from him. When they had finished he stood, walked to the wood stove, lifted the lid and spat inside it; the stove crackled and spat back a spark.

"If it was just you two," he said to Peter and Sara, "I'd run you in and find out what you been smokin'. But Mills here don't have the imagination for this kind of foolishness, so I guess I got to believe you." He set down the lid with a clank and squinted at Peter. "You said you wrote somethin' 'bout Ellen Borchard in your book. What?"

Peter leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "She was down at Smith Point just after dark. She was angry at her parents, and she wanted to scare them. So she took off her blouse—she had extra clothes with her, because she was planning to run away—and was about to rip it up, to make them think she'd been murdered, when the wind killed her."

"Now how'd it do that?" asked Weldon.

"In the book the wind was a sort of elemental. Cruel, capricious. It played with her. Knocked her down, rolled her along the shingle. Then it would let her up and knock her down again. She was bleeding all over from the shell-cuts, and screaming. Finally it whirled her up and out to sea." Peter stared down at his hands; the inside of his head felt heavy, solid, as if his brains were made of mercury.

"Jesus Christ!" said Weldon. "What you got to say 'bout that, Mills?"

"It wasn't no normal wind," said Mills. "That's all I know."

"Jesus Christ!" repeated Weldon; he rubbed the back of his neck and peered at Peter. "I been twenty years at this job and I've heard some tall tales. But this . . . what did you say it was? An elemental?"

"Yeah, but I don't really know for sure. Maybe if I could handle those combs again, I could learn more about it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Peter." Sara put her hand on his arm; her brow was furrowed. "Why don't we let Hugh deal with it?"

Weldon was amused. "Naw, Sara. You let Mr. Ramey see what he can do." He chuckled. "Maybe he can tell me how the Red Sox are gonna do this year. Me and Mills can have another look at that mess off the point."

Mills' neck seemed to retract into his shoulders. "I ain't goin' back out there, Hugh. And if you want my opinion, you better keep clear of it yourself."

"Damn it, Mills." Weldon smacked his hand against his hip. "I ain't gonna beg, but you sure as hell could save me some trouble. It'll take me an hour to get the Coast Guard boys off their duffs. Wait a minute!" He turned to Peter. "Maybe you people were seein' things. There musta been all kinds of bad chemicals fumin' up from that mess. Could be you breathed somethin' in." Brakes squealed, a car door slammed, and seconds later the bedraggled figure of Sally McColl strode past the window and knocked on the door.

"What in God's name does she want?" said Weldon.

Peter opened the door, and Sally gave him a gap-toothed grin. "Mornin', Peter," she said. She was wearing a stained raincoat over her usual assortment of dresses and sweaters, and a gaily-colored man's necktie for a scarf. "Is that skinny ol' fart Hugh Weldon inside?"

"I ain't got time for your crap today, Sally," called Weldon.

Sally pushed past Peter. "Mornin', Sara. Mills."

"Hear one of your dogs just had a litter," said Mills.

"Yep. Six snarly little bastards." Sally wiped her nose with the back of her hand and checked it to see what had rubbed off. "You in the market?"

"I might drop 'round and take a look," said Mills. "Dobermans or Shepherds?"

"Dobermans. Gonna be fierce."

"What's on your mind, Sally?" said Weldon, stepping between them.

"Got a confession to make."

Weldon chuckled. "What'd you do now? You sure as hell didn't burglarize no dress shop."

A frown etched the wrinkles deeper on Sally's face. "You stupid son of a bitch," she said flatly. "I swear, God musta been runnin' short of everything but horseshit when He made you."

"Listen, you ol' . . ."

"Musta ground up your balls and used 'em for brains," Sally went on. "Musta . . ."

"Sally!" Peter pushed them apart and took the old woman by the shoulders. A glaze faded from her eyes as she looked at him. At last she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shrugged free of his grasp and patted down her hair: a peculiarly feminine gesture for someone so shapeless and careworn.

"I shoulda told you sooner," she said to Weldon. "But I was sick of you laughin' at me. Then I decided it might be important and I'd have to risk listenin' to your jackass bray. So I'm tellin' you." She looked out the window. "I know what done them condominiums. It was the wind." She snapped a hateful glance at Weldon. "And I ain't crazy, neither!"

Peter felt weak in the knees. They were surrounded by trouble; it was in the air as it had been off Smith Point, yet stronger, as if he were becoming sensitized to the feeling.

"The wind," said Weldon, acting dazed.

"That's right," said Sally defiantly. "It punched holes in them damn buildin's and was whistlin' through 'em like it was playin' music." She glared at him. "Don't you believe me?"

"He believes you," said Peter. "We think the wind killed Ellen Borchard."

"Now don't be spreadin' that around! We ain't sure!" Weldon said it desperately, clinging to disbelief.

Sally crossed the room to Peter. "It's true 'bout the Borchard girl, ain't it?"

"I think so," he said.

"And that thing what killed her, it's here in Madaket. You feel it, don'tcha?"

He nodded. "Yeah."

Sally headed for the door.

"Where you goin'?" asked Weldon. She mumbled and went outside; Peter saw her pacing back and forth in the yard. "Crazy ol' bat," said Weldon.

"Mebbe she is," said Mills. "But you ought not to be treatin' her so harsh after all she's done."

"What's she done?" asked Peter.

"Sally used to live up in Madaket," said Mills. "And whenever a ship would run up on Dry Shoals or one of the others, she'd make for the wreck in that ol' lobster boat of hers. Most times she'd beat the Coast Guard to 'em. Musta saved fifty or sixty souls over the years, sailin' out in the worst kind of weather."

"Mills!" said Weldon emphatically. "Run me out to that garbage dump of yours."

Mills stood and hitched up his pants. "Ain't you been listenin', Hugh? Peter and Sally say that thing's 'round here somewhere."

Weldon was a frustrated man. He sucked at his teeth, and his face worked. He picked up the container holding the combs, glanced at Peter, then set the container down.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You want me to see what I can learn from those?" asked Peter.

Weldon shrugged. "Can't hurt nothin', I guess." He stared out the window, as if unconcerned with the issue.

Peter took the container and sat down next to Sara. "Wait," she said. "I don't understand. If this thing is nearby, shouldn't we get away from here?" Nobody answered.

The plastic container was cold, and when Peter pried off the lid the cold welled out at him. Intense, aching cold, as if he had opened the door to a meat locker.

Sally burst into the room and pointed at the container. "What's that?"

"Some old combs," said Peter. "They didn't feel like this when I found them. Not as strong."

"Feel like what?" asked Weldon; every new mystery seemed to be unnerving him further, and Peter suspected that if the mysteries weren't cleared up soon, the chief would start disbelieving them on purely practical grounds.

Sally came over to Peter and looked into the container. "Gimme one," she said, extending a grimy hand. Weldon and Mills moved up behind her, like two old soldiers flanking their mad queen.

Reluctantly, Peter picked up one of the combs. Its coldness flowed into his arm, his head, and for a moment he was in the midst of a storm-tossed sea, terrified, waves crashing over the bows of a fishing boat and the wind singing around him. He dropped the comb. His hands were trembling, and his heart was doing a jig against his chest wall.

"Oh, shit," he said to no one in particular. "I don't know if I want to do this."

Sara gave Sally her seat beside Peter, and as they handled the combs, setting them down every minute or so to report what they had learned, she chewed her nails and fretted. She could relate to Hugh Weldon's frustration; it was awful just to sit and watch. Each time Peter and Sally handled the combs their respiration grew shallow and their eyes rolled back, and when they laid them aside they appeared drained and frightened.

"Gabriela Pascual was from Miami," said Peter. "I can't tell exactly when all this happened, but it was years ago . . . because in my image of her, her clothes look a little old-fashioned. Maybe ten or fifteen years back. Something like that. Anyway, there was trouble for her on shore, some emotional entanglement, and her brother didn't want to leave her alone, so he took her along on a fishing voyage. He was a commercial fisherman."

"She had the gift," Sally chimed in. "That's why there's so much of her in the combs. That, and because she killed herself and died holdin' 'em."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why'd she kill herself?" asked Weldon.

"Fear," said Peter. "Loneliness. Crazy as it sounds, the wind was holding her prisoner. I think she cracked up from being alone on a drifting boat with only this thing—the elemental—for company."

"Alone?" said Weldon. "What happened to her brother?"

"He died." Sally's voice was shaky. "The wind came down and killed 'em all 'cept this Gabriela. It wanted her."

As the story unfolded, gusts of wind began to shudder the cottage and Sara tried to remain unconcerned as to whether or not they were natural phenomena. She turned her eyes from the window, away from the heaving trees and bushes, and concentrated on what was being said; but that in itself was so eerie that she couldn't keep from jumping whenever the panes rattled. Gabriela Pascual, said Peter, had been frequently seasick during the cruise; she had been frightened of the crew, most of whom considered her bad luck, and possessed by a feeling of imminent disaster. And, Sally added, that premonition had been borne out. One cloudless, calm day the elemental had swept down and killed everyone. Everyone except Gabriela. It had whirled the crew and her brother into the air, smashed them against bulkheads, dropped them onto the decks. She had expected to die as well, but it had seemed interested in her. It had caressed her and played with her, knocking her down and rolling her about; and at night it had poured through the passageways and broken windows, making a chilling music that—as the days passed and the ship drifted north—she came to half-understand.

"She didn't think of it as a spirit," said Peter. "There wasn't anything mystical about it to her mind. It struck her as being kind of a . . ."

"An animal," interrupted Sally. "A big, stupid animal. Vicious, it was. But not evil. 'Least it didn't feel evil to her."

Gabriela, Peter went on, had never been sure what it wanted of her—perhaps her presence had been all. Most of the time it had left her alone. Then, suddenly, it would spring up out of a calm to juggle splinters of glass or chase her about. Once the ship had drifted near to shore, and when she had attempted to jump over the side, the elemental had battered her and driven her belowdecks. Though at first it had controlled the drift of the ship, gradually it lost interest in her and on several occasions the ship almost foundered. Finally, no longer caring to prolong the inevitable, she had cut her wrists and died clutching the container holding her most valued possessions, her grandmother's silver combs, with the wind howling in her ears.

Peter leaned back against the wall, his eyes shut, and Sally sighed and patted her breast. For a long moment no one spoke.

"Wonder why it's hangin' 'round that garbage out there," said Mills.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Maybe no reason," said Peter dully. "Or maybe it's attracted to slack points in the tides, to some condition of the air."

"I don't get it," said Weldon. "What the hell is it? It can't be no animal."

"Why not?" Peter stood, swayed, then righted himself. "What's wind, anyway? Charged ions, vacating air masses. Who's to say that some stable form of ions couldn't approximate a life? Could be there's one of these at the heart of every storm, and they've always been mistaken for spirits, given an anthropomorphic character. Like Ariel." He laughed disconsolately. "It's no breezy sprite, that's for sure."

Sally's eyes looked unnaturally bright, like watery jewels lodged in her weathered face. "The sea breeds 'em," she said firmly, as if that were explanation enough of anything strange.

"Peter's book was right," said Sara. "It's an elemental. That's what you're describing, anyway. A violent, inhuman creature, part spirit and part animal." She laughed, and the laugh edged a bit high, bordering on the hysteric. "It's hard to believe."

"Right!" said Weldon. "Damned hard! I got an ol' crazy woman and a man I don't know from Adam tellin' me . . ."

"Listen!" said Mills; he walked to the door and swung it open.

It took Sara a second to fix on the sound, but then she realized that the wind had died, had gone from heavy gusts to trifling breezes in an instant, and further away, coming from the sea, or nearer, maybe as close as Tennessee Avenue, she heard a roaring.

5

A few moments earlier Jerry Highsmith had been both earning his living and looking forward to a night of exotic pleasures in the arms of Ginger McCurdy. He was standing in front of one of the houses on Tennessee Avenue, its quarterboard reading AHAB-ITAT, and a collection of old harpoons and whalebones mounted on either side of the door; his bicycle leaned against a rail fence behind him, and ranged around him, straddling their bikes, dolled up in pastel-hued jogging suits and sweat clothes, were twenty-six members of the Peach State Ramblers Bicycle Club. Ten men, sixteen women. The women were all in good shape, but most were in their thirties, a bit long in the tooth for Jerry's taste. Ginger, on the other hand, was prime. Twenty-three or twenty-four, with red hair down to her ass and a body that wouldn't quit. She had peeled off her sweats and was blooming out a halter and shorts cut so high that each time she dismounted you could see right up to the Pearly Gates. And she knew what she was doing: every jiggle of those twin jaloobies was aimed at his crotch. She had pressed to the front of the group and was attending to his spiel about the bullshit whaling days. Oh, yeah!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ginger was ready. A couple of lobsters, a little wine, a stroll along the waterfront, and then by God he'd pump her so full of the Nantucket Experience that she'd breach like a snow-white hill.

Thar she fuckin' blows!

"Now, y'all . . ." he began.

They tittered; they liked him mocking their accent.

He grinned abashedly as if he hadn't known what he was doing. "Must be catchin'," he said. "Now you people probably haven't had a chance to visit the Whaling Museum, have you?"

A chorus of Nos.

"Well then, I'll give you a course in harpoonin'." He pointed at the wall of the AHAB-ITAT. "That top one with the single barb stickin' off the side, that's the kind most commonly used during the whalin' era. The shaft's of ash. That was the preferred wood. It stands up to the weather"—he stared pointedly at Ginger—"and it won't bend under pressure." Ginger tried to constrain a smile. "Now that one," he continued, keeping an eye on her, "the one with the arrow point and no barbs, that was favored by some whalers. They said it allowed for deeper penetration."

"What about the one with two barbs?" asked someone.

Jerry peered over heads and saw that the questioner was his second choice. Ms. Selena Persons. A nice thirtyish brunette, flat-chested, but with killer legs. Despite the fact that he was obviously after Ginger, she hadn't lost interest. Who knows? A double-header might be a possibility.

"That was used toward the end of the whalin' era," he said. "But generally two-barbed harpoons weren't considered as effective as single-barbed ones. I don't know why, exactly. Might have just been stubbornness on the whalers' part. Resistance to change. They knew the ol' single-barb could give satisfaction."

Ms. Persons met his gaze with the glimmer of a smile.

" 'Course," Jerry continued, addressing all the Ramblers, "now the shaft's tipped with a charge that explodes inside the whale." He winked at Ginger and added *sotto voce*, "Must be a rush."

She covered her mouth with her hand.

"Okay, folks!" Jerry swung his bike away from the fence. "Mount up and we'll be off to the next thrillin' attraction."

Laughing and chattering, the Ramblers started to mount, but just then a powerful gust of wind swept down Tennessee Avenue, causing squeals and blowing away hats. Several of the riders overbalanced and fell, and several more nearly did. Ginger stumbled forward and clung to Jerry, giving him chest-to-chest massage. "Nice catch," she said, doing a little writhe as she stepped away.

"Nice toss," he replied.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She smiled, but the smile faded and was replaced by a bewildered look. "What's that?"

Jerry turned. About twenty yards away a column of whirling leaves had formed above the blacktop; it was slender, only a few feet high, and though he had never seen anything similar it alarmed him no more than had the freakish gust of wind. Within seconds, however, the column had grown to a height of fifteen feet; twigs and gravel and branches were being sucked into it, and it sounded like a miniature tornado. Someone screamed. Ginger clung to him in genuine fright. There was a rank smell in the air, and a pressure was building in Jerry's ears. He couldn't be sure, because the column was spinning so rapidly, but it seemed to be assuming a roughly human shape, a dark green figure made of plant litter and stones. His mouth had gone dry, and he restrained an urge to throw Ginger aside and run.

"Come on!" he shouted.

A couple of the Ramblers managed to mount their bicycles, but the wind had grown stronger, roaring, and it sent them wobbling and crashing into the weeds. The rest huddled together, their hair whipping about, and stared at the great Druid thing that was taking shape and swaying above them, as tall as the treetops. Shingles were popping off the sides of the houses, sailing up and being absorbed by the figure; and as Jerry tried to outvoice the wind, yelling at the Ramblers to lie flat, he saw the whalebones and harpoons ripped from the wall of the AHAB-ITAT. The windows of the house exploded outward. One man clutched the bloody flap of his cheek, which had been sliced open by a shard of glass; a woman grabbed the back of her knee and crumpled. Jerry shouted a final warning and pulled Ginger down with him into the roadside ditch. She squirmed and struggled, in a panic, but he forced her head down and held tight. The figure had risen much higher than the trees, and though it was still swaying, its form had stabilized somewhat. It had a face now: a graveyard smile of gray shingles and two circular patches of stones for eyes: a terrible blank gaze that seemed responsible for the increasing air pressure. Jerry's heart boomed in his inner ear, and his blood felt like sludge. The figure kept swelling, up and up; the roar was resolving into an oscillating hum that shivered the ground. Stones and leaves were beginning to spray out of it. Jerry knew, *knew*, what was going to happen, and he couldn't keep from watching. Amid a flurry of leaves he saw one of the harpoons flit through the air, impaling a woman who had been trying to stand. The force of the blow drove her out of Jerry's field of vision. Then the great figure exploded. Jerry squeezed his eyes shut. Twigs and balls of dirt and gravel stung him. Ginger leaped sideways and collapsed atop him, clawing at his hip. He waited for something

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worse to happen, but nothing did. "You okay?" he asked, pushing Ginger away by the shoulders.

She wasn't okay.

A splintered inch of whalebone stuck out from the center of her forehead. Shrieking with revulsion, Jerry wriggled from beneath her and came to his hands and knees. A moan. One of the men was crawling toward him, his face a mask of blood, a ragged hole where his right eye had been; his good eye looked glazed like a doll's. Horrified, not knowing what to do, Jerry scrambled to his feet and backed away. All the harpoons, he saw, had found targets. Most of the Ramblers lay unmoving, their blood smeared over the blacktop; the rest were sitting up, dazed and bleeding. Jerry's heel struck something, and he spun about. The quarterboard of the AHAB-ITAT had nailed Ms. Selena Persons vampire-style to the roadside dirt; the board had been driven so deep into the ground that only the letter A was showing above the mired ruin of her jogging suit, as if she were an exhibit. Jerry began to tremble, and tears started from his eyes.

A breeze ruffled his hair.

Somebody wailed, shocking him from his daze. He should call the hospital, the police. But where was a phone? Most of the houses were empty, waiting for summer tenants, and the phones wouldn't be working. Somebody must have seen what had happened, though. He should just do what he could until help arrived. Gathering himself, he walked toward the man whose eye was missing; but before he had gone more than a few paces a fierce gust of wind struck him in the back and knocked him flat.

This time the roaring was all around him, the pressure so intense that it seemed a white-hot needle had pierced him from ear-to-ear. He shut his eyes and clamped both hands to his ears, trying to smother the pain. Then he felt himself lifted. He couldn't believe it at first. Even when he opened his eyes and saw that he was being borne aloft, revolving in a slow circle, it made no sense. He couldn't hear, and the quiet added to his sense of unreality; further adding to it, a riderless bicycle pedaled past. The air was full of sticks and leaves and pebbles, a threadbare curtain between him and the world, and he imagined himself rising in the gorge of that hideous dark figure. Ginger McCurdy was flying about twenty feet overhead, her red hair streaming, arms floating languidly as if in a dance. She was revolving faster than he, and he realized that his rate of spin was increasing as he rose. He saw what was going to happen: you went higher and higher, faster and faster, until you were spewed out, shot out over the village. His mind rebelled at the prospect of death, and he tried to swim back down the wind, flailing, kicking, bursting with fear. But as he whirled higher, twisting and turning, it became hard to breathe, to think, and he was too dizzy to be afraid any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

longer. Another woman sailed by a few feet away. Her mouth was open, her face contorted; blood dripped from her scalp. She clawed at him, and he reached out to her, not knowing why he bothered. Their hands just missed touching. Thoughts were coming one at a time. Maybe he'd land in the water. Miraculous Survivor Of Freak Tornado. Maybe he'd fly across the island and settle gently in a Nantucket treetop. A broken leg, a bruise or two. They'd set up drinks for him in the Atlantic Cafe. Maybe Connie Keating would finally come across, would finally recognize the miraculous potential of Jerry Highsmith. Maybe. He was tumbling now, limbs jerking about, and he gave up thinking. Flash glimpses of the gapped houses below, of the other dancers on the wind, moving with spasmodic abandon. Suddenly, as he was bent backwards by a violent updraft, there was a wrenching pain inside him, a grating, then a vital dislocation that delivered him from pain. Oh Christ Jesus! Oh God! Dazzles exploded behind his eyes. Something bright blue flipped past him, and he died.

6

After the column of leaves and branches looming up from Tennessee Avenue had vanished, after the roaring had died, Hugh Weldon sprinted for his squad car with Peter and Sara at his heels. He frowned as they piled in but made no objection, and this, Peter thought, was probably a sign that he had stopped trying to rationalize events, that he accepted the wind as a force to which normal procedures did not apply. He switched on the siren, and they sped off. But less than fifty yards from the cottage he slammed on the brakes. A woman was hanging in a hawthorn tree beside the road, an old-fashioned harpoon plunged through her chest. There was no point in checking to see if she was alive. All her major bones were quite obviously broken, and she was painted with blood head to foot, making her look like a horrid African doll set out as a warning to trespassers.

Weldon got on the radio. "Body out in Madaket," he said. "Send a wagon."

"You might need more than one," said Sara; she pointed to three dabs of color further up the road. She was very pale, and she squeezed Peter's hand so hard that she left white imprints on his skin.

Over the next twenty-five minutes they found eighteen bodies: broken, mutilated, several pierced by harpoons or fragments of bone. Peter would not have believed that the human form could be reduced to such grotesque statements, and though he was horrified, nauseated, he became increasingly numbed by what he saw. Odd thoughts flocked to his brain, most persistent among them being that the violence had been done partly for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his benefit. It was a sick, nasty idea, and he tried to dismiss it; but after a while he began to consider it in light of other thoughts that had lately been striking him out of the blue. The manuscript of *How The Wind Spoke At Madaket*, for instance. As improbable as it sounded, it was hard to escape the conclusion that the wind had been seeding all this in his brain. He didn't want to believe it, yet there it was, as believable as anything else that had happened. And given that, was his latest thought any less believeable? He was beginning to understand the progression of events, to understand it with the same sudden clarity that had helped him solve the problems of his book, and he wished very much that he could have obeyed his premonition and not touched the combs. Until then the elemental had not been sure of him; it had been nosing around him like—as Sally had described it—a big, stupid animal, sensing something familiar about him but unable to remember what. And when he had found the combs, when he had opened the container, there must have been some kind of circuit closed, a flashpoint sparked between his power and Gabriela Pascual's, and the elemental had made the connection. He recalled how excited it had seemed, darting back and forth beyond the borders of the aggregate.

As they turned back onto Tennessee Avenue, where a small group of townsfolk were covering bodies with blankets, Weldon got on the radio again, interrupting Peter's chain of logic. "Where the hell are them ambulances?" he snapped.

"Sent 'em a half hour ago," came the reply. "Shoulda been there by now."

Weldon cast a grim look at Peter and Sara. "Try 'em on the radio," he told the operator.

A few minutes later the report came that none of the ambulances were answering their radios. Weldon told his people to stay put, that he'd check it out himself. As they turned off Tennessee Avenue onto the Nantucket road, the sun broke through the overcast, flooding the landscape in a thin yellow light and warming the interior of the car. The light seemed to be illuminating Peter's weaknesses, making him realize how tense he was, how his muscles ached with the poisons of adrenaline and fatigue. Sara leaned against him, her eyes closed, and the pressure of her body acted to shore him up, to give him a burst of vitality.

Weldon kept the speed at thirty, glancing left and right, but nothing was out of the ordinary. Deserted streets, houses with blank-looking windows. Many of the homes in Madaket were vacant, and the occupants of many of the rest were away at work or off on errands. About two miles out of town, as they crested a low rise just beyond the dump, they spotted the ambulances. Weldon pulled onto the shoulder, letting the engine idle, and stared at the sight. Four ambulances were strewn across the black-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

top, forming an effective roadblock a hundred feet away. One had been flipped over on its roof like a dead white bug; another had crashed into a light pole and was swathed in electrical lines whose broken ends were sticking in through the driver's window, humping and writhing and sparking. The other two had been smashed together and were burning; transparent licks of flame warped the air above their blackened husks. But the wrecked ambulances were not the reason that Weldon had stopped so far away, why they sat silent and hopeless. To the right of the road was a field of bleached weeds and grasses, an Andrew Wyeth field glowing yellow in the pale sun, figured by a few stunted oaks and extending to a hill overlooking the sea, where three gray houses were posed against a faded blue sky. Though only fitful breezes played about the squad car, the field was registering the passage of heavy winds; the grasses were rippling, eddying, bending and swaying in contrary directions, as if thousands of low-slung animals were scampering through them to and fro, and this rippling was so constant, so furious, it seemed that the shadows of the clouds passing overhead were standing still and the land was flowing away. The sound of the wind was a mournful, whistling rush. Peter was entranced. The scene had a fey power that weighed upon him, and he had trouble catching his breath.

"Let's go," said Sara tremulously. "Let's . . ." She stared past Peter, a look of fearful comprehension forming on her face.

The wind had begun to roar. Less than thirty feet away a patch of grass had been flattened, and a man wearing an orderly's uniform was being lifted into the air, revolving slowly. His head flopped at a ridiculous straw-man angle, and the front of his tunic was drenched with blood. The car shuddered in the turbulence.

Sara shrieked and clutched at Peter. Weldon tried to jam the gearshift into reverse, missed, and the car stalled. He twisted the key in the ignition. The engine sputtered, dieseled and went dead. The orderly continued to rise, assuming a vertical position. He spun faster and faster, blurring like an ice skater doing a fancy finish, and at the same time drifted closer to the car. Sara was screaming, and Peter wished he could scream, could do something to release the tightness in his chest. The engine caught. But before Weldon could put the car in gear, the wind subsided and the orderly fell onto the hood. Drops of blood sprinkled the windshield. He lay spreadeagled for a moment, his dead eyes staring at them. Then, with the obscene sluggishness of a snail retracting its foot, he slumped down onto the road, leaving a red smear across the white metal.

Weldon rested his head on the wheel, taking deep breaths. Peter cradled Sara in his arms. After a second Weldon leaned back, picked up the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

radio mike and thumbed the switch open. "Jack," he said. "This is Hugh. You copy?"

"Loud and clear, chief."

"We got us a problem out in Madaket."-Weldon swallowed hard and gave a little twitch of his head. "I want you to set up a roadblock 'bout five miles from town. No closer. And don't let nobody through, y'understand?"

"What's happenin' out there, chief? Alice Cuddy called in and said somethin' 'bout a freak wind, but the phone went dead and I couldn't get her back."

"Yeah, we had us some wind." Weldon exchanged a glance with Peter. "But the main problem's a chemical spill. It's under control for now, but you keep everybody away. Madaket's in quarantine."

"You need some help?"

"I need you to do what I told you! Get on the horn and call everyone livin' 'tween the roadblock and Madaket. Tell 'em to head for Nantucket as quick as they can. Put the word on the radio, too."

"What 'bout folks comin' from Madaket? Do I let 'em through?"

"Won't be nobody comin' that way," said Weldon.

Silence. "Chief, you okay?"

"Hell, yes!" Weldon switched off.

"Why didn't you tell them?" asked Peter.

"Don't want 'em thinkin' I'm crazy and comin' out to check on me," said Weldon. "Ain't no point in them dyin', too." He shifted into reverse. "I'm gonna tell everyone to get in their cellars and wait this damn thing out. Maybe we can figure out somethin' to do. But first I'll take you home and let Sara get some rest."

"I'm all right," she said, lifting her head from Peter's chest.

"You'll feel better after a rest," he said, forcing her head back down: it was an act of tenderness, but also he did not want her to catch sight of the field. Dappled with cloud shadow; glowing palely; some quality of light different from that which shone upon the squad car; it seemed at a strange distance from the road, a view into an alternate universe where things were familiar yet not quite the same. The grasses were rippling more furiously than ever, and every so often a column of yellow stalks would whirl high into the air and scatter, as if an enormous child were running through the field, ripping up handfuls of them to celebrate his exuberance.

"I'm not sleepy," Sara complained; she still hadn't regained her color, and one of her eyelids had developed a tic.

Peter sat beside her on the bed. "There's nothing you can do, so why not rest?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What are you going to do?"

"I thought I'd have another go at the combs."

The idea distressed her. He started to explain why he had to, but instead bent and kissed her on the forehead. "I love you," he said. The words slipped out so easily that he was amazed. It had been a very long time since he had spoken them to anyone other than a memory.

"You don't have to tell me that just because things look bad," she said, frowning.

"Maybe that's why I'm telling you now," he said. "But I don't believe it's a lie."

She gave a dispirited laugh. "You don't sound very confident."

He thought it over. "I was in love with someone once," he said, "and that relationship colored my view of love. I guess I believed that it always had to happen the same way. A nuclear strike. But I'm beginning to understand it can be different, that you can build toward the sound and the fury."

"It's nice to hear," she said, and then, after a pause, "but you're still in love with her, aren't you?"

"I still think about her, but . . ." He shook his head. "I'm trying to put it behind me, and maybe I'm succeeding. I had a dream about her this morning."

She arched an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"It wasn't a sweet dream," he said. "She was telling me how she'd cemented over her feelings for me. 'All that's left,' she said, 'is this little hard place on my breast.' And she told me that sometimes it moved around, twitched, and she showed me. I could see the damn thing jumping underneath her blouse, and when I touched it—she wanted me to—it was unbelievably hard. Like a pebble lodged beneath her skin. A heart stone. That was all that was left of us. Just this piece of hardness. It pissed me off so much that I threw her on the floor. Then I woke up." He scratched his beard, embarrassed by confession. "It was the first time I've ever had a violent thought about her."

Sara stared at him, expressionless.

"I don't know if it's meaningful," he said lamely. "But it seemed so."

She remained silent. Her stare made him feel guilty for having had the dream, sorry that he had mentioned it.

"I don't dream about her very much," he said.

"It's not important," she said.

"Well." He stood. "Try and get some sleep, okay?"

She reached for his hand. "Peter?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you. But you knew that, right?"

It hurt him to see how hesitantly she said it, because he knew that he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was to blame for her hesitancy. He bent down and kissed her again. "Sleep," he said. "We'll talk about it later."

He closed the door behind him gently. Mills was sitting at the table, gazing out at 'Sconset Sally, who was pacing the yard, her lips moving, waving her arms, as if arguing with an invisible playmate. "That ol' gal sure's gone down these last years," said Mills. "Used to be sharp as a tack, but she's actin' pretty crazy now."

"Can't blame her," said Peter, sitting down across from Mills. "I'm feeling pretty crazy myself."

"So." Mills tamped tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. "You got a line on what this thing is?"

"Maybe it's the Devil." Peter leaned against the wall. "I don't really know, but I'm starting to think that Gabriela Pascual was right about it being an animal."

Mills chomped on the stem of his pipe and fished in his pocket for a lighter. "How's that?"

"Like I said, I don't really know for sure, but I've been getting more and more sensitized to it ever since I found the combs. At least it seems that way. As if the connection between us were growing stronger." Peter spotted a book of matches tucked under his sugar bowl and slid them across to Mills. "I'm beginning to have insights about it. When we were out on the road just now, I felt that it was exhibiting an animal trait. Staking out territory. Protecting it from invaders. Look who it's attacked. Ambulances, bicyclists. People who were entering its territory. It attacked us when we visited the aggregate."

"But it didn't kill us," said Mills.

The logical response to Mills' statement surfaced from Peter's thoughts, but he didn't want to admit to it and shunted it aside. "Maybe I'm wrong," he said.

"Well, if it is an animal, then it can take a hook. All we got to do is find its mouth." Mills grunted laughter, lit his pipe and puffed bluish smoke. "After you been out on the water a coupla weeks, you can feel when something strange is hard by . . . even if you can't see it. I ain't no psychic, but seems to me I brushed past this thing once or twice."

Peter glanced up at him. Though Mills was a typical bar-room creature, an old salt with a supply of exotic tales, every now and then Peter could sense a kind of specific gravity about him, the kind that accrues to those who have spent time in the solitudes. "You don't seem afraid," he said.

"Oh, don't I?" Mills chuckled. "I'm afraid. I'm just too old to be runnin' 'round in circles 'bout it."

The door flew open, and Sally came in. "Hot in here," she said; she went to the stove and laid a finger against it. "Hmph! Must be all this shit I'm wearin'." She plumped herself down beside Mills, squirmed into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a comfortable position and squinted at Peter. "Goddamn wind won't have me," she said. "It wants you."

Peter was startled. "What do you mean?"

Sally pursed her lips as if she had tasted something sour. "It would take me if you wasn't here, but you're too strong. I can't figure a way 'round that."

"Leave the boy alone," said Mills.

"Can't." Sally glowered at him. "He's got to do it."

"You know what she's talkin' 'bout?" asked Mills.

"Hell, yes! He knows! And if he don't, all he's got to do is go talk to it. You understand me, boy. It wants *you*."

An icy fluid squirted down Peter's spine. "Like Gabriela," he said. "Is that what you mean?"

"Go on," said Sally. "Talk to it." She pointed a bony finger at the door. "Just take a stand out there, and it'll come to you."

Behind the cottage, walled off by the spread of two Japanese pines and a tool shed, was a field that the previous tenant had used for a garden. Peter had let it go to seed, and the entire plot was choked with weeds and litter: gas cans, rusty nails, a plastic toy truck, the decaying hide of a softball, cardboard scraps, this and more resting upon a matte of dessicated vines. It reminded him of the aggregate and thus seemed an appropriate place to stand and commune with the wind . . . if such a communion weren't the product of 'Sconset Sally's imagination. Which Peter hoped it was. The afternoon was waning, and it had grown colder. Silver blares of wintery sunlight edged the blackish-gray clouds scudding overhead, and the wind was a steady pour off the sea. He could detect no presence in it, and he was beginning to feel foolish, thinking about going back inside, when a bitter-smelling breeze rippled across his face. He stiffened. Again he felt it: it was acting independent of the off-shore wind, touching delicate fingers to his lips, his eyes, fondling him the way a blind man would in trying to know your shape in his brain. It feathered his hair and pried under the pocket flaps of his army jacket like a pet mouse searching for cheese; it frittered with his shoelaces and stroked him between the legs, shriveling his groin and sending a chill washing through his body.

He did not quite understand how the wind spoke to him, yet he had an image of the process as being similar to how a cat will rub against your hand and transmit a static charge. The charge was actual, a mild stinging and popping. Somehow it was translated into knowledge, doubtless by means of his gift. The knowledge was personified, and he was aware that his conceptions were human renderings of inhuman impulses; but at the same time he was certain that they were basically accurate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Most of all it was lonely. It was the only one of its kind, or, if there were others, it had never encountered them. Peter felt no sympathy for its loneliness, because it felt no sympathy for him. It wanted him not as a friend or companion but as a witness to its power. It would enjoy preening for him, showing off, rubbing against his sensitivity to it and deriving some unfathomable pleasure. It was very powerful. Though its touch was light, its vitality was undeniable, and it was even stronger over water. The land weakened it, and it was eager to return to the sea with Peter in tow. Gliding together through the wild canyons of the waves, into a chaos of booming darkness and salt spray, traveling the most profound of all deserts—the sky above the sea—and testing its strength against the lesser powers of the storms, seizing flying fish and juggling them like silver blades, gathering nests of floating treasures and playing for weeks with the bodies of the drowned. Always at play. Or perhaps "play" was not the right word. Always employed in expressing the capricious violence that was its essential quality. Gabriela Pascual might not have been exact in calling it an animal, but what else could you call it? It was of nature, not of some netherworld. It was ego without thought, power without morality, and it looked upon Peter as a man might look upon a clever toy: something to be cherished for a while, then neglected, then forgotten.

Then lost.

Sara waked at twilight from a dream of suffocation. She sat bolt upright, covered with sweat, her chest heaving. After a moment she calmed herself and swung her legs onto the floor and sat staring into space. In the half-light the dark grain of the boards looked like a pattern of animal faces emerging from the wall; out the window she could see shivering bushes and banks of running clouds. Still feeling sluggish, she went into the front room, intending to wash her face; but the bathroom door was locked and 'Sconset Sally cawed at her from inside. Mills was snoozing on the sofa bunk, and Hugh Weldon was sitting at the table, sipping a cup of coffee; a cigarette smouldered in the saucer, and that struck her as funny: she had known Hugh all her life and had never seen him smoke.

"Where's Peter?" she asked.

"Out back," he said moodily. "Buncha damn foolishness if you ask me."

"What is?"

He gave a snort of laughter. "Sally says he's talkin' to the goddamn wind."

Sara felt as if her heart had constricted. "What do you mean?"

"Beats the hell outta me," said Weldon. "Just more of Sally's nonsense." But when their eyes met she could sense his hopelessness and fear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She broke for the door. Weldon grabbed at her arm, but she shook free and headed for the Japanese pines back of the cottage. She brushed aside the branches and stopped short, suddenly afraid. The bending and swaying of the weeds revealed a slow circular passage of wind, as if the belly of a great beast were dragging across them, and at the center of the field stood Peter. His eyes were closed, his mouth open, and strands of hair were floating above his head like the hair of a drowned man. The sight stabbed into her, and forgetting her fear, she ran toward him, calling his name. She had covered half the distance between them when a blast of wind smashed her to the ground.

Stunned and disoriented, she tried to get to her feet, but the wind smacked her flat again, pressing her into the damp earth. As had happened out on the aggregate, garbage was rising from the weeds. Scraps of plastic, rusty nails, a yellowed newspaper, rags, and, directly overhead, a large chunk of kindling. She was still dazed, yet she saw with peculiar clarity how the bottom of the chunk was splintered and flecked with whitish mold. It was quivering, as if the hand that held it were barely able to restrain its fury. And then, as she realized it was about to plunge down, to jab out her eyes and pulp her skull, Peter dived on top of her. His weight knocked the breath out of her, but she heard the piece of kindling *thunk* against the back of his head; she sucked in air and pushed at him, rolling him away, and came to her knees. He was dead-pale.

"Is he all right?"

It was Mills, lumbering across the field. Behind him, Weldon had hold of 'Sconset Sally, who was struggling to escape. Mills had come perhaps a third of the way when the garbage, which had fallen back into the weeds, once more was lifted into the air, swirling, jiggling, and—as the wind produced one of its powerful gusts—hurtling toward him. For a second he was surrounded by a storm of cardboard and plastic; then this fell away, and he took a staggering step forward. A number of dark dots speckled his face. Sara thought at first they were clots of dirt. Then blood seeped out around them. They were rusty nailheads. Piercing his brow, his cheeks, pinning his upper lip to his gum. He gave no cry. His eyes bulged, his knees buckled, he did an ungainly pirouette and pitched into the weeds.

Sara watched dully as the wind fluttered about Hugh Weldon and Sally, belling their clothes; it passed beyond them, lashing the pine boughs and vanishing. She spotted the hump of Mills' belly through the weeds. A tear seemed to be carving a cold groove in her cheek. She hiccuped, and thought what a pathetic reaction to death that was. Another hiccup, and another. She couldn't stop. Each successive spasm made her weaker, more unsteady, as if she were spitting up tiny fragments of her soul.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

7

As darkness fell, the wind poured through the streets of the village, playing its tricks with the living, the inanimate, and the dead. It was indiscriminate, the ultimate free spirit doing its thing, and yet one might have ascribed a touch of frustration to its actions. Over Warren's Landing it crumpled a seagull into a bloody rag, and near the mouth of Hither Creek it scattered field mice into the air. It sent a spare tire rolling down the middle of Tennessee Avenue and skied shingles from the roof of the AHAB-ITAT. For a while it flowed about aimlessly; then, increasing to tornado-force, it uprooted a Japanese pine, just yanked it from the ground, dangling huge black root balls, and chucked it like a spear through the side of a house across the street. It repeated the process with two oaks and a hawthorn. Finally it began to blast holes in the walls of the houses and snatch the wriggling creatures inside. It blew off old Julia Stackpole's cellar door and sailed it down into the shelves full of preserves behind which she was hiding; it gathered the broken glass into a hurricane of knives that slashed her arms, her face, and—most pertinently—her throat. It found even older George Coffin (who wasn't about to hide, because in his opinion Hugh Weldon was a damned fool) standing in his kitchen, having just stepped back in after lighting his barbecue; it swept up the coals and hurled them at him with uncanny accuracy. Over the space of a half-hour it killed twenty-one people and flung their bodies onto their lawns, leaving them to bleed pale in the accumulating dusk. Its fury apparently abated, it dissipated to a breeze and—zipping through shrubs and pine boughs—it fled back to the cottage, where something it now wanted was waiting in the yard.

8

'Sconset Sally sat on the woodpile, sucking at a bottle of beer that she'd taken from Peter's refrigerator. She was as mad as a wet hen, because she had a plan—a good plan—and that brainless wonder Hugh Weldon wouldn't hear it, wouldn't listen to a damn word she said. Stuck on being ıero, he was.

The sky had deepened to indigo, and a big lopsided silver moon was leering at her from over the roof of the cottage. She didn't like its eye on her and she spat toward it. The elemental caught the gob of spit and spun it around high in the air, making it glisten oysterlike. Fool thing! Half monster, half a walloping, invisible dog. It reminded her of that outsized old male of hers, Rommel. One second he'd be going for the mailman's throat, and the next he'd be on his back and waggling his paws, begging for a treat. She screwed her bottle into the grass so it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wouldn't spill and picked up a stick of kindling. "Here," she said, and shied the stick. "Fetch." The elemental caught the stick and juggled it for a few seconds, then let it fall at her feet. Sally chuckled. "Me'n you might get along," she told the air. " 'Cause neither one of us gives a shit!" The beer bottle lifted from the grass. She made a grab for it and missed. "Goddamn it!" she yelled. "Bring that back!" The bottle sailed to a height of about twenty feet and tipped over; the beer spilled out, collected in half a dozen large drops that—one by one—exploded into spray, showering her. Sputtering, she jumped to her feet and started to wipe her face; but the elemental knocked her back down. A trickle of fear welled up inside her. The bottle still hovered above her; after a second it plopped into the grass, and the elemental curled around her, fidgeting with her hair, her collar, slithering inside her raincoat; then, abruptly, as if something else had attracted its attention, it was gone. She saw the grass flatten as it passed over, moving toward the street. She propped herself against the woodpile and finished wiping her face; she spotted Hugh Weldon through the window, pacing, and her anger was rekindled. Thought he was so goddamn masterful, did he? He didn't know piss about the elemental, and there he was, laughing at her plan.

Well, screw him!

He'd find out soon enough that his plan wouldn't work, that hers was the reasonable one, the surefire one.

A little scary, maybe, but surefire all the same.

9

It had come full dark by the time Peter regained consciousness. He moved his head, and the throbbing nearly caused him to black out. He lay still, getting his bearings. Moonlight spilled through the bedroom window, and Sara was leaning beside it, her blouse glowing a phosphorescent white. From the tilt of her head he judged that she was listening to something, and he soon distinguished an unusual pattern to the wind: five notes followed by a glissando, which led to a repetition of the passage. It was a heavy, angry music, an ominous hook that might have been intended to signal the approach of a villain. Shortly thereafter the pattern broke into a thousand skirling notes, as if the wind were being forced through the open stops of a chorus of flutes. Then another passage, this of seven notes, more rapid but equally ominous. A chill, helpless feeling stole over Peter, like the drawing of a morgue sheet. That breathy music was being played for him. It was swelling in volume, as if—and he was certain this was the case—the elemental was heralding his awakening, was once again sure of his presence. It was impatient, and it would not wait for him much longer. Each note drilled that message home. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought of being alone with it on the open sea terrified him. Yet he had no choice. There was no way to fight it, and it would simply keep on killing until he obeyed. If it weren't for the others he would refuse to go; he would rather die here than submit to that harrowing, unnatural relationship. Or was it unnatural? It occurred to him that the history of the wind and Gabriela Pascual had a great deal in common with the histories of many human relationships. Desiring; obtaining; neglecting; forgetting. It might be that the elemental was some sort of core existence, that at the heart of every relationship lay a howling emptiness, a chaotic music.

"Sara," he said, wanting to deny it.

The moonlight seemed to wrap around her as she turned. She came to sit beside him. "How are you feeling?"

"Woozy." He gestured toward the window. "How long's that been going on?"

"It just started," she said. "It's punched holes in a lot of the houses. Hugh and Sally were out a while ago. More people are dead." She brushed a lock of hair from his forehead. "But . . ."

"But what?"

"We have a plan."

The wind was playing eerie triplets, an agitated whistling that set Peter's teeth on edge. "It better be a doozy," he said.

"Actually, it's Hugh's plan," she said. "He noticed something out in the field. The instant you touched me, the wind withdrew from us. If it hadn't, if it had hurled that piece of wood at you instead of letting it drop, you would have died. And it didn't want that . . . at least that's what Sally says."

"She's right. Did she tell you what it does want?"

"Yes." She looked away, and her eyes caught the moonlight; they were teary. "Anyway, we think it was confused, that when we're close together it can't tell us apart. And since it doesn't want to hurt you or Sally, Hugh and I are safe as long as we maintain proximity. If Mills had just stayed where he was . . ."

"Mills?"

She told him.

After a moment, still seeing Mills' nail-studded face in his mind's eye, he asked, "What's the plan?"

"I'm going to ride in the jeep with Sally, and you're going with Hugh. We'll drive toward Nantucket, and when we reach the dump . . . you know that dirt road there that leads off into the moors?"

"The one that leads to Altar Rock? Yeah."

"At that point you'll jump into the jeep with us, and we'll head for Altar Rock. Hugh will keep going toward Nantucket. Since it seems to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be trying to isolate this end of the island, he figures it'll come after him and we might be able to get beyond its range, and with both of us heading in different directions, we might be able to confuse it enough so that it won't react quickly, and he'll be able to escape, too." She said all this in a rush that reminded Peter of the way a teenager would try to convince her parents to let her stay out late, blurting out the good reasons before they had time to raise any objections.

"You might be right about it not being able to tell us apart when we're close to each other," he said. "God knows how it senses things, and that seems plausible. But the rest is stupid. We don't know whether its territoriality is limited to this end of the island. And what if it does lose track of me and Sally? What's it going to do then? Just blow away? Somehow I doubt it. It might head for Nantucket and do what it's done here."

"Sally says she has a back-up plan."

"Christ, Sara!" Gingerly, he eased up into a sitting position. "Sally's nuts. She doesn't have a clue."

"Well, what choice do we have?" Her voice broke. "You can't go with it."

"You think I want to? Jesus!"

The bedroom door opened, and Weldon appeared silhouetted in a blur of orange light that hurt Peter's eyes. "Ready to travel?" said Weldon. 'Sconset Sally was at his rear, muttering, humming, producing a human static.

Peter swung his legs off the bed. "This is nuts, Weldon." He stood and steadied himself on Sara's shoulder. "You're just going to get killed." He gestured toward the window and the constant music of the wind. "Do you think you can outrun that in a squad car?"

"Mebbe this plan ain't worth a shit . . ." Weldon began.

"You got that right!" said Peter. "If you want to confuse the elemental, why not split me and Sally up? One goes with you, the other with Sara. That way at least there's some logic to this."

"Way I figure it," said Weldon, hitching up his pants, "it ain't your job to be riskin' yourself. It's mine. If Sally, say, goes with me, you're right, that'd confuse it. But so might this. Seems to me it's as eager to keep us normal people in line as it is to run off with freaks like you 'n Sally."

"What . . ."

"Shut up!" Weldon eased a step closer. "Now if my way don't work, you try it yours. And if *that* don't do it, then you can go for a cruise with the damn thing. But we don't have no guarantees it's gonna let anybody live no matter what you do."

"No, but . . ."

"No buts about it! This is my bailiwick, and we're gonna do what I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

say. If it don't work, well, then you can do what you have to. But 'til that happens . . ."

" 'Til that happens you're going to keep on making an ass of yourself," said Peter. "Right? Man, all day you've been looking for a way to assert your fucking authority! You don't have any authority in this situation. Don't you understand?"

Weldon went jaw to jaw with him. "Okay," he said. "You go on out there, Mr. Ramey. Go ahead. Just march on out there. You can use Mills' boat, or if you want something bigger, how 'bout Sally's." He snapped a glance back at Sally. "That okay with you, Sally?" She continued muttering, humming, and nodded her head. "See!" Weldon turned to Peter. "She don't mind. So you go ahead. You draw that son of a bitch away from us if you can." He hitched up his pants and exhaled; his breath smelled like a coffee cup full of cigarette butts. "But if it was me, I'd be 'bout ready to try anything else."

Peter's legs felt rooted to the floor. He realized that he had been using anger to muffle fear, and he did not know if he could muster up the courage to take a walk out into the wind, to sail away into the terror and nothingness that Gabriela Pascual had faced.

Sara slipped her hand through his arm. "Please, Peter," she said. "It can't hurt to try."

Weldon backed off a step. "Nobody's blamin' you for bein' scared, Mr. Ramey," he said. "I'm scared myself. But this is the only way I can figure to do my job."

"You're going to die." Peter had trouble swallowing. "I can't let you do that."

"You ain't got nothin' to say 'bout it," said Weldon. " 'Cause you got no more authority than me. 'Less you can tell that thing to leave us be. Can you?"

Sara's fingers tightened on Peter's arm, but relaxed when he said, "No."

"Then we'll do 'er my way." Weldon rubbed his hands together in what seemed to Peter hearty anticipation. "Got your keys, Sally?"

"Yeah," she said, exasperated; she moved close to Peter and put a birdclaw hand on his wrist. "Don't worry, Peter. This don't work, I got somethin' up my sleeve. We'll pull a fast one on that devil." She cackled and gave a little whistle, like a parrot chortling over a piece of fruit.

As they drove slowly along the streets of Madaket, the wind sang through the ruined houses, playing passages that sounded mournful and questioning, as if it were puzzled by the movements of the jeep and the squad car. The light of a three-quarter moon illuminated the destruction: gaping holes in the walls, denuded bushes, toppled trees. One of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

houses had been given a surprised look, an O of a mouth where the door had been, flanked by two shattered windows. Litter covered the lawns. Flapping paperbacks, clothing, furniture, food, toys. And bodies. In the silvery light their flesh was as pale as Swiss cheese, the wounds dark. They didn't seem real; they might have been a part of a gruesome environment created by an avant-garde sculptor. A carving knife skittered along the blacktop, and for a moment Peter thought it would jump into the air and hurtle toward him. He glanced over at Weldon to see how he was taking it all. Wooden Indian profile, eyes on the road. Peter envied him his pose of duty; he wished he had such a role to play, something that would brace him up, because every shift in the wind made him feel frail and rattled.

They turned onto the Nantucket road, and Weldon straightened in his seat. He checked the rear view mirror, keeping an eye on Sally and Sara, and held the speed at twenty-five. "Okay," he said as they neared the dump and the road to Altar Rock. "I ain't gonna come to a full stop, so when I give the word you move it."

"All right," said Peter; he took hold of the door handle and let out a calming breath. "Good luck."

"Yeah." Weldon sucked at his teeth. "Same to you."

The speed indicator dropped to fifteen, to ten, to five, and the moonlit landscape inched past.

"Go!" shouted Weldon.

Peter went. He heard the squad car squeal off as he sprinted toward the jeep; Sara helped haul him into the back, and then they were veering onto the dirt road. Peter grabbed the frame of Sara's seat, bouncing up and down. The thickets that covered the moors grew close to the road, and branches whipped the sides of the jeep. Sally was hunched over the wheel, driving like a maniac; she sent them skipping over potholes, swerving around tight corners, grinding up the little hills. There was no time to think, only to hold on and be afraid, to await the inevitable appearance of the elemental. Fear was a metallic taste in Peter's mouth; it was in the white gleam of Sara's eyes as she glanced back at him and the smears of moonlight that coursed along the hood; it was in every breath he took, every trembling shadow he saw. But by the time they reached Altar Rock, after fifteen minutes or so, he had begun to hope, to half-believe, that Weldon's plan had worked.

The rock was almost dead-center of the island, its highest point. It was a barren hill atop which stood a stone where the Indians had once conducted human sacrifices—a bit of history that did no good whatsoever for Peter's nerves. From the crest you could see for miles over the moors, and the rumpled pattern of depressions and small hills had the look of a sea that had been magically transformed to leaves during a moment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of fury. The thickets—bayberry and such—were dusted to a silvery-green by the moonlight, and the wind blew steadily, giving no evidence of unnatural forces.

Sara and Peter climbed from the jeep, followed after a second by Sally. Peter's legs were shaky and he leaned against the hood; Sara leaned back beside him, her hip touching his. He caught the scent of her hair. Sally peered toward Madaket. She was still muttering, and Peter made out some of the words:

"Stupid . . . never would listen to me . . . never would . . . son of a bitch . . . keep it to my goddamn self . . ."

Sara nudged him. "What do you think?"

"All we can do is wait," he said.

"We're going to be all right," she said firmly; she rubbed the heel of her right hand against the knuckles of her left. It seemed the kind of childish gesture intended to insure good luck, and it inspired him to tenderness. He pulled her into an embrace. Standing there, gazing past her head over the moors, he had an image of them as being the standard lovers on the cover of a paperback, clinging together on a lonely hill, with all probability spread out around them. A corny way of looking at things, yet he felt the truth of it, the dizzying immersion that a paperback lover was supposed to feel. It was not as clear a feeling as he had once had, but perhaps clarity was no longer possible for him. Perhaps all his past clarity had simply been an instance of faulty perception, a flash of immaturity, an adolescent misunderstanding of what was possible. But whether or not that was the case, self-analysis would not solve his confusion. That sort of thinking blinded you to the world, made you disinclined to take risks. It was similar to what happened to academics, how they became so committed to their theories that they began to reject facts to the contrary, to grow conservative in their judgments and deny the inexplicable, the magical. If there was magic in the world—and he knew there was—you could only approach it by abandoning the constraints of logic and lessons learned. For more than a year he had forgotten this and had constructed defenses against magic; now in a single night they had been blasted away, and at a terrible cost he had been made capable of risking himself again, of hoping.

Then he noticed something that wasted hope.

Another voice had been added to the natural flow of wind from the ocean, and in every direction, as far as the eye could see, the moon-silvered thickets were rippling, betraying the presence of far more wind than was evident atop the hill. He pushed Sara away. She followed his gaze and put a hand to her mouth. The immensity of the elemental stunned Peter. They might have been standing on a crag in the midst of a troubled sea, one that receded into an interstellar dark. For the first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time, despite his fear, he had an apprehension of the elemental's beauty, of the precision and intricacy of its power. One moment it could be a tendril of breeze, capable of delicate manipulations, and the next it could become an entity the size of a city. Leaves and branches—like flecks of black space—were streaming up from the thickets, forming into columns. Six of them, at regular intervals about Altar Rock, maybe a hundred yards away. The sound of the wind evolved into a roar as they thickened and grew higher. And they grew swiftly. Within seconds the tops of the columns were lost in darkness. They did not have the squat, conical shapes of tornadoes, nor did they twist and jab down their tails; they merely swayed, slender and graceful and menacing. In the moonlight their whirling was almost undetectable and they looked to be made of shining ebony, like six enormous savages poised to attack. They began moving toward the hill. Splintered bushes exploded upward from their bases, and the roaring swelled into a dissonant chord: the sound of a hundred harmonicas being blown at once. Only much, much louder.

The sight of 'Sconset Sally scuttling for the jeep waked Peter from his daze; he pushed Sara into the rear seat and climbed in beside Sally. Though the engine was running, it was drowned out by the wind. Sally drove even less cautiously than before; the island was criss-crossed by narrow dirt roads, and it seemed to Peter that they almost crashed on every one of them. Skidding sideways through a flurry of bushes, flying over the crests of hills, diving down steep slopes. The thickets grew too high in most places for him to see much, but the fury of the wind was all around them and once, as they passed a place where the bushes had been burned off, he caught a glimpse of an ebony column about fifty yards away. It was traveling alongside them, he realized. Harrowing them, running them to and fro. Peter lost track of where they were, and he could not believe that Sally had any better idea. She was trying to do the impossible, to drive out of the wind, which was everywhere, and her lips were drawn back in a grimace of fear. Suddenly—they had just turned east—she slammed on the brakes. Sara flew halfway into the front seat, and if Peter had not been braced he might have gone through the windshield. Further along the road one of the columns had taken a stand, blocking their path. It looked like God, he thought. An ebony tower reaching from the earth to the sky, spraying clouds of dust and plant litter from its bottom. And it was moving toward them. Slowly. A few feet per second. But definitely on the move. The jeep was shaking, and the roar seemed to be coming from the ground beneath them, from the air, from Peter's body, as if the atoms of things were all grinding together. Frozen-faced, Sally wrangled with the gearshift. Sara screamed, and Peter, too, screamed as the windshield was sucked out of its frame and whirled off. He braced himself against the dash, but his arms were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weak and with a rush of shame he felt his bladder go. The column was less than a hundred feet away, a great spinning pillar of darkness. He could see how the material inside it aligned itself into tightly packed rings like the segments of a worm. The air was syrupy, hard to breathe. And then, miraculously, they were swerving away from it, away from the roaring, backing along the road. They turned a corner, and Sally got the jeep going forward; she sent them grinding up a largish hill . . . and braked. And let her head drop onto the steering wheel in an attitude of despair. They were once again at Altar Rock.

And Hugh Weldon was waiting for them.

He was sitting with his head propped against the boulder that gave the place its name. His eyes were filled with shadows. His mouth was open, and his chest rose and fell. Labored breathing, as if he had just run a long way. There was no sign of the squad car. Peter tried to call to him, but his tongue was stuck to his palate and all that came out was a strangled grunt. He tried again.

"Weldon!"

Sara started to sob, and Sally gasped. Peter didn't know what had frightened them and didn't care; for him the process of thought had been thinned down to following one track at a time. He climbed from the jeep and went over to the chief. "Weldon," he said again.

Weldon sighed.

"What happened?" Peter knelt beside him and put a hand on his shoulder; he heard a hiss and felt a tremor pass through the body.

Weldon's right eye began to bulge. Peter lost his balance and sat back hard. Then the eye popped out and dropped into the dust. With a high-pitched whistling, wind and blood sprayed from the empty socket. Peter fell backwards, scrabbling at the dirt in an effort to put distance between himself and Weldon. The corpse toppled onto its side, its head vibrating as the wind continued to pour out, boiling up dust beneath the socket. There was a dark smear marking the spot on the boulder where the head had rested.

Until his heart rate slowed, Peter lay staring at the moon, as bright and distant as a wish. He heard the roaring of the wind from all sides and realized that it was growing louder, but he didn't want to admit to it. Finally, though, he got to his feet and gazed out across the moors.

It was as if he were standing at the center of an unimaginably large temple, one forested with dozens upon dozens of shiny black pillars rising from a dark green floor. The nearest of them were about a hundred yards away, and those were unmoving; but as Peter watched, others farther off began to slew back and forth, gliding in and out of the stationary ones, like dancing cobras. There was a fever in the air, a pulse of heat and energy, and this as much as the alienness of the sight was what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

transfixed him and held him immobile. He found that he had gone beyond fear. You could no more hide from the elemental than you could from God. It would lead him onto the sea to die, and its power was so compelling that he almost acknowledged its right to do this. He climbed into the jeep. Sara looked beaten. Sally touched his leg with a palsied hand.

"You can use my boat," she said.

On the way back to Madaket, Sara sat with her hands clasped in her lap, outwardly calm but inwardly turbulent. Thoughts fired across her brain so quickly that they left only partial impressions, and those were seared away by lightning strokes of terror. She wanted to say something to Peter, but words seemed inadequate to all she was feeling. At one point she decided to go with him, but the decision sparked a sudden resentment. He didn't love her! Why should she sacrifice herself for him? Then, realizing that he was sacrificing himself for her, that he did love her or that at least this was an act of love, she decided that if she went it would make his act meaningless. That decision caused her to question whether or not she was using his sacrifice to obscure her true reason for staying behind: her fear. And what about the quality of her feelings for him? Were they so uncertain that fear could undermine them? In a blaze of irrationality she saw that he was pressuring her to go with him, to prove her love, something she had never asked him to do. What right did he have? With half her mind she understood the unreasonableness of these thoughts, yet she couldn't stop thinking them. She felt all her emotions winnowing, leaving her hollow . . . like Hugh Weldon, with only the wind inside him, propping him up, giving him the semblance of life. The grotesqueness of the image caused her to shrink further inside herself, and she just sat there, growing dim and empty, saying nothing.

"Buck up," said Sally out of the blue, and patted Peter's leg. "We got one thing left to try." And then, with what seemed to Sara an irrational good cheer, she added: "But if that don't work the boat's got fishin' tackle and a coupla cases of cherry brandy on board. I was too damn drunk to unload 'em yesterday. Cherry brandy be better'n water for where you're headed."

Peter gave no reply.

As they entered the village, the elemental chased beside them, whirling up debris, scattering leaves, tossing things high into the air. Playing, thought Sara. It was playing. Frisking along like a happy pup, like a petulant child who'd gotten his way and now was all smiles. She was overwhelmed with hatred for it and she dug her nails into the seat cushion, wishing she had a way to hurt it. Then, as they passed Julia Stackpole's house, the corpse of Julia Stackpole sat up. Its bloody head hung down, its frail arms flapping. The entire body appeared to be vi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brating, and with a horrid disjointed motion, amid a swirling of papers and trash, it went rolling over and over and came to rest against a broken chair. Sara shrank back into a corner of the seat, her breath ragged and shallow. A thin cloud swept free of the moon and the light measurably brightened, making the gray of the houses seem gauzy and immaterial; the holes in their sides looked real enough—black, cavernous—as if the walls and doors and windows had only been a facade concealing emptiness.

Sally parked next to a boathouse a couple of hundred yards north of Smith Point: a rickety wooden structure the size of a garage. Beyond it a stretch of calm black water was figured by a blaze of moonlight. "You gonna have to row out to the boat," Sally told Peter. "Oars are in here." She unlocked the door and flicked on a light. The inside of the place was as dilapidated as Sally herself. Raw boards; spiderwebs spanning between paint cans and busted lobster traps; a jumble of two-by-fours. Sally went stumping around, mumbling and kicking things, searching for the oars; her footsteps set the light bulb dangling from the roof to swaying, and the light slopped back and forth over the walls like dirty yellow water. Sara's legs were leaden. It was hard to move, and she thought maybe this was because there weren't any moves left. Peter took a few steps toward the center of the boathouse and stopped, looking lost. His hands twitched at his sides. She had the idea that his expression mirrored her own: slack, spiritless, with bruised crescents under his eyes. She moved, then. The dam that had been holding back her emotions burst, and her arms were around him, and she was telling him that she couldn't let him go alone, telling him half-sentences, phrases that didn't connect. "Sara," he said. "Jesus." He held her very tightly. The next second, though, she heard a dull *thonk* and he sagged against her, almost knocking her down, and slumped to the floor. Brandishing a two-by-four, Sally bent to him and struck again.

"What are you doing?" Sara screamed it and began to wrestle with Sally. Their arms locked, they waltzed around and around for a matter of seconds, the light bulb jiggling madly. Sally sputtered and fumed; spittle glistened on her lips. Finally, with a snarl, she shoved Sara away. Sara staggered back, tripped over Peter and fell sprawling beside him.

"Listen!" Sally cocked her head and pointed to the roof with the two-by-four. "Goddamn it! It's workin'!"

Sara came warily to her feet. "What are you talking about?"

Sally picked up her fisherman's hat, which had fallen off during the struggle, and squashed it down onto her head. "The wind, goddamn it! I told that stupid son of a bitch Hugh Weldon, but oh, no! He never listened to nobody."

The wind was rising and fading in volume, doing so with such a regular

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rhythm that Sara had the impression of a creature made of wind running frantically back and forth. Something splintered in the distance.

"I don't understand," said Sara.

"Unconscious is like dead to it," said Sally; she gestured at Peter with the board. "I knew it was so, 'cause after it did for Mills it came for me. It touched me up all over, and I could tell it'd have me, then. But that stupid bastard wouldn't listen. Had to do things his goddamn way!"

"It would have you?" Sara glanced down at Peter, who was unstirring, bleeding from the scalp. "You mean instead of Peter?"

" 'Course that's what I mean." Sally frowned. "Don't make no sense him goin'. Young man with all his future ahead. Now me . . ." She yanked at the lapel of her raincoat as if intending to throw herself away. "What I got to lose? A coupla years of bein' alone. I ain't eager for it, y'understand. But it don't make sense any other way. Tried to tell Hugh that, but he was stuck on bein' a goddamn hero."

Her bird-bright eyes glittered in the webbed flesh, and Sara had a perception of her that she had not had since childhood: the zany old spirit, half-mad but with one eye fixed on some corner of creation that nobody else could see. She remembered all the stories. Sally trying to signal the moon with a hurricane lamp; Sally rowing through a nor'easter to pluck six sailors off Whale Shoals; Sally passing out dead-drunk at the ceremony the Coast Guard had given in her honor; Sally loosing her dogs on the then-junior senator from Massachusetts when he had come to present her a medal. Crazy Sally. She suddenly seemed valuable to Sara.

"You can't . . ." she began, but broke off and stared at Peter.

"Can't not," said Sally, and clucked her tongue. "You see somebody looks after my dogs."

Sara nodded.

"And you better check on Peter," said Sally. "See if I hit him too hard."

Sara started to comply but was struck by a thought. "Won't it know better this time? Peter was knocked out before. Won't it have learned?"

"I suppose it can learn," said Sally. "But it's real stupid, and I don't think it's figured this out." She gestured at Peter. "Go ahead. See if he's all right."

The hairs on Sara's neck prickled as she knelt beside Peter, and she was later to reflect that in the back of her mind she had known what was about to happen. But even so she was startled by the blow.

10

It wasn't until late the next afternoon that the doctors allowed Peter to have visitors other than the police. He was still suffering from dizziness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and blurred vision, and mentally speaking he alternated between periods of relief and depression. Seeing in his mind's eye the mutilated bodies, the whirling black pillars. Tensing as the wind prowled along the hospital walls. In general he felt walled off from emotion, but when Sara came into the room those walls crumbled. He drew her down beside him and buried his face in her hair. They lay for a long time without speaking, and it was Sara who finally broke the silence.

"Do they believe you?" she asked. "I don't think they believe me."

"They don't have much choice," he said. "I just think they don't want to believe it."

After a moment she said, "Are you going away?"

He pulled back from her. She had never looked more beautiful. Her eyes were wide, her mouth drawn thin, and the strain of all that had happened to them seemed to have carved an unnecessary ounce of fullness from her face. "That depends on whether or not you'll go with me," he said. "I don't want to stay. Whenever the wind changes pitch every nerve in my body signals an air raid. But I won't leave you. I want to marry you."

Her reaction was not what he had expected. She closed her eyes and kissed him on the forehead—a motherly, understanding kiss; then she settled back on the pillow, gazing calmly at him.

"That was a proposal," he said. "Didn't you catch it?"

"Marriage?" She seemed perplexed by the idea.

"Why not? We're qualified." He grinned. "We both have concussions."

"I don't know," she said. "I love you, Peter, but . . ."

"But you don't trust me?"

"Maybe that's part of it," she said, annoyed. "I don't know."

"Look." He smoothed down her hair. "Do you know what really happened in the boathouse last night?"

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"I'll tell you. What happened was that an old woman gave her life so you and I could have a chance at something." She started to speak but he cut her off. "That's the bones of it. I admit the reality's a bit more murky. God knows why Sally did what she did. Maybe saving lives was a reflex of her madness, maybe she was tired of living. Maybe it just seemed a good idea at the time. And as for us, we haven't exactly been Romeo and Juliet. I've been confused, and I've confused you. And aside from whatever problems we might have as a couple, we have a lot to forget. Until you came in I was feeling shell-shocked, and that's a feeling that's probably going to last for a while. But like I said, the heart of the matter is that Sally died to give us a chance. No matter what her motives, what our circumstance, that's what happened. And we'd be fools to let that chance slip away." He traced the line of her cheekbone with a finger.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I love you. I've loved you for a long time and tried to deny it, to hold onto a dead issue. But that's all over."

"We can't make this sort of decision now," she murmured.

"Why not?"

"You said it yourself. You're shell-shocked. So am I. And I don't know how I feel about . . . everything."

"Everything? You mean me?"

She made a non-committal noise, closed her eyes, and after a moment she said, "I need time to think."

In Peter's experience when women said they needed time to think nothing good ever came of it. "Jesus!" he said angrily. "Is this how it has to be between people? One approaches, the other avoids, and then they switch roles. Like insects whose mating instincts have been screwed up by pollution." He registered what he had said and had a flash-feeling of horror. "Come on, Sara! We're past that kind of dance, aren't we? It doesn't have to be marriage, but let's commit to something. Maybe we'll make a mess of it, maybe we'll end up boring each other. But let's try. It might not be any effort at all." He put his arms around her, brought her tight against him, and was immersed in a cocoon of heat and weakness. He loved her, he realized, with an intensity that he had not believed he could recapture. His mouth had been smarter than his brain for once—either that or he had talked himself into it. The reasons didn't matter.

"For Christ's sake, Sara!" he said. "Marry me. Live with me. Do something with me!"

She was silent; her left hand moved gently over his hair. Light, distracted touches. Tucking a curl behind his ear, toying with his beard, smoothing his mustache. As if she were making him presentable. He remembered how that other long-ago woman had become increasingly silent and distracted and gentle in the days before she had dumped him.

"Damn it!" he said with a growing sense of helplessness. "Answer me!"

11

On the second night out 'Sconset Sally caught sight of a winking red light off her port bow. Some ship's riding light. It brought a tear to her eye, making her think of home. But she wiped the tear away with the back of her hand and had another slug of cherry brandy. The cramped wheelhouse of the lobster boat was cozy and relatively warm; beyond, the moonlit plain of the sea was rising in light swells. Even if you didn't have nowhere good to go, she thought, wheels and keels and wings gave a boost to your spirit. She laughed. Especially if you had a supply of cherry brandy. She had another slug. A breeze curled around her arm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and tugged at the neck of the bottle. "Goddamn it!" she squawked. "Get away!" She batted at the air as if she could shoo away the elemental, and hugged the bottle to her breast. Wind uncoiled a length of rope on the deck behind her, and then she could hear it moaning about the hull. She staggered to the wheelhouse door. "Whoo-oo-ooh!" she sang, mocking it. "Don't be making your godawful noises at me, you sorry bastard! Go kill another goddamn fish if you want somethin' to do. Just leave me alone to my drinkin'."

Waves surged up on the port side. Big ones, like black teeth. Sally almost dropped the bottle in her surprise. Then she saw they weren't really waves but shapes of water made by the elemental. "You're losin' your touch, asshole!" she shouted. "I seen better'n that in the movies!" She slumped down beside the door, clutching the bottle. The word "movies" conjured flashes of old films she'd seen, and she started singing songs from them. She did "Singin' In The Rain" and "Blue Moon" and "Love Me Tender." She knocked back swallows of brandy in between the verses, and when she felt primed enough she launched into her favorite. "The sound that you hear," she bawled, "is the sound of Sally! A joy to be heard for a thousand years." She belched. "The hills are alive with the sound of Sally . . ." She couldn't recall the next line, and that ended the concert.

The wind built to a howl around her, and her thoughts sank into a place where there were only dim urges and nerves fizzling and blood whining in her ears. Gradually she surfaced from it and found that her mood had become one of regret. Not about anything specific. Just general regrets. General Regrets. She pictured him as an old fogey with a white walrus mustache and a Gilbert-and-Sullivan uniform. Epaulets the size of skateboards. She couldn't get the picture out of her head and she wondered if it stood for something important. If it did she couldn't make it come clear. Like that line of her favorite song, it had leaked out through one of her cracks. Life had leaked out the same way, and all she could remember of it was a muddle of lonely nights and sick dogs and scallop shells and half-drowned sailors. Nothing important sticking up from the muddle. No monument to accomplishment or romance. Hah! She'd never met the man who could do what men said they could. The most reasonable men she'd known were those shipwrecked sailors, and their eyes big and dark as if they'd seen into some terrible bottomland that had sheared away their pride and stupidity. Her mind began to whirl, trying to get a fix on life, to pin it down like a dead butterfly and know its patterns, and soon she realized that she was literally whirling. Slowly, but getting faster and faster. She hauled herself up and clung to the wheelhouse door and peered over the side. The lobster boat was spinning around and around on the lip of a bowl of black water several hundred yards across.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A whirlpool. Moonlight struck a glaze down its slopes but didn't reach the bottom. Its roaring, heart-stopping power scared her, made her giddy and faint. But after a moment she banished fear. So this was death. It just opened up and swallowed you whole. All right. That was fine by her. She slumped against the wheelhouse and drank deeply of the cherry brandy, listening to the wind and the singing of her blood as she went down not giving a damn. It sure beat puking up life a gob at a time in some hospital room. She kept slurping away at the brandy, guzzling it, wanting to be as looped as possible when the time came. But the time didn't come, and before too long she noticed that the boat had stopped spinning. The wind had quieted and the sea was calm.

A breeze coiled about her neck, slithered down her breast and began curling around her legs, flipping the hem of her dress. "You bastard," she said soddenly, too drunk to move. The elemental swirled around her knees, belling the dress, and touched her between the legs. It tickled, and she swatted at it ineffectually, as if it were one of the dogs snooting at her. But a second later it prodded her there again, a little harder than before, rubbing back and forth, and she felt a quiver of arousal. It startled her so that she went rolling across the deck, somehow keeping her bottle upright. That quiver stuck with her, though, and for an instant a red craving dominated the broken mosaic of her thoughts. Cackling and scratching herself, she staggered to her feet and leaned on the rail. The elemental was about fifty yards off the port bow, shaping itself a waterspout, a moonstruck column of blackness, from the placid surface of the sea.

"Hey!" she shouted, wobbling along the rail. "You come on back here! *I'll* teach you a new trick!"

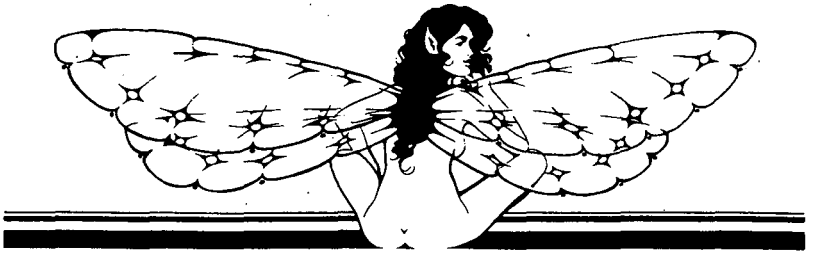
The waterspout grew higher, a glistening black serpent that *whooshed* and sucked the boat toward it; but it didn't bother Sally. A devilish joy was in her, and her mind crackled with lightnings of pure craziness. She thought she had figured out something. Maybe nobody had ever taken a real interest in the elemental, and maybe that was why it eventually lost interest in them. Wellsir! She had an interest in it. Damn thing couldn't be any more stupid than some of her Dobermans. Snooted like one, for sure. She'd teach it to roll over and beg and who knows what else. Fetch me that fish, she'd tell it. Blow me over to Hyanis and smash the liquor store window and bring me six bottles of brandy. She'd show it who was boss. And could be one day she'd sail into the harbor at Nantucket with the thing on a leash. 'Sconset Sally and her pet storm, Scourge of the Seven Seas.

The boat was beginning to tip and slew sideways in the pull of the waterspout, but Sally scarcely noticed. "Hey!" she shouted again, and chuckled. "Maybe we can work things out! Maybe we're meant for each

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other!" She tripped over a warp in the planking, and the arm holding the bottle flailed above her head. Moonlight seemed to stream down into the bottle, igniting the brandy so that it glowed like a magic elixir, a dark red ruby flashing from her hand. Her maniacal laugh went sky-high.

"You come on back here!" she screeched at the elemental, exulting in the wild frequencies of her life, at the thought of herself in league with this idiot god, and unmindful of her true circumstance, of the thundering around her and the tiny boat slipping toward the foaming base of the waterspout. "Come back here, damn it! We're two of a kind! We're birds of a feather! I'll sing you to sleep each night! You'll serve me my supper! I'll be your old, cracked bride, and we'll have a hell of a honeymoon while it lasts!" ●



NEXT ISSUE

Bruce Sterling's first story to appear in *IAsfm,* "Dinner in Audoghast," will be accompanied by J.K. Potter's beautiful cover and interior illustrations. Other stories in the May issue include John Kessel's stark view of the future in "A Clean Escape" and Pat Cadigan's moving look at an alien encounter in "After the Days of Dead Eye 'Dee." We'll also have tales by Marta Randall, Lewis Shiner, Michael Swanwick, Pat Murphy, Lisa Goldstein, and others. May's Viewpoint, "The Little Tin God of Characterization," is a controversial piece by Isaac Asimov. Look for it on April 9, 1985.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand
By Samuel R. Delany
Bantam, $16.95

Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand is about as easy a read as its title is short. Most SF and fantasy writers these days tell stories (too often, one gets the impression, to the kiddies gathered at their knees); Samuel R. Delany constructs novels, and if you just want to be told a story, skip this one. On the other hand, if you're one of those who feels that art (and that includes written fiction) needs some work from the viewer/listener/reader, here's one of the rare genre examples of just that.

And it *is* truly SF, not one of those artsy mainstream efforts borrowing from, or jumping on, the SF bandwagon. Perhaps its difference from the usual effort in the field these days can be made by saying that it's more like a book *of* the future than one *about* the future. Let's say you're a literate person of the year 1800, and you're given a 19th-century science fiction novel about 1985, which in the process of telling its story, mentions jet planes, computers, nuclear energy, and television, and gives some idea of what these things are and how they work (subtly worked into the story, if it's good SF).

Say instead, by some trick of time, a mainstream novel *from* 1985 falls into your hands, mentioning, in passing, software, Amtrak, centerfolds, kinetic sculpture, Moonies, and space music. Get the point?

Writing a science fiction story of the future in the style of that future is a device that's been used at times to impart realistic atmosphere, but Delany takes it to an extreme, to just this side of comprehensibility. No, it's not that it's in one of those manufactured languages; it's in clear (if sometimes pretty arcane) English. But there are constant references to concepts in this complex future of thousands of settled worlds that we poor 20th-century types just don't know about, and which we may, if we pay attention and use our heads, figure out eventually. There's the GI (General Information) web, for instance, where one can tap into all of the information available on all six thousand worlds—mentally. Or the fact that the words "male" and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"he" are archaic usage; the generic term for humans is "woman," the adjective "she," which gets pretty confusing when you're trying to figure out the sex of some of the characters. And speaking of sex, there's a fair amount of unorthodox goings-on, human–human *and* human–alien, which is presented less as exploitative than as one more sphere of activity in which to exercise complicated speculation.

I said it's in clear English, but I may be being optimistic there. Delany has a penchant for complexity, in vocabulary and structure, which doesn't make things easier. There's one paragraph on page 90, which takes up a good part of the page. It's all one sentence, and after I'd finished reading it, I *knew* it made sense, but what it was escaped me. I tackled that paragraph three times, and got a vague notion of its meaning; twenty pages later an explanation of a reference in that sentence clarified matters (more or less; I won't even go into the words with subscripts [little 1s and 2s halfway below the line] attached).

At this point, you may well ask petulantly, "But what is it *about?*" I was afraid you'd ask that. "Yes —oh dear, yes—the novel tells a story," said E.M. Forster, when asked about one of *his* novels, in a "drooping, regretful voice." Those authors, like Delany, who work with words, who hammer out their prose rather than spinning yarns, would seem to almost prefer *not* to tell stories, but there *is* one somewhere down there in *Stars in My Etc.*

The prologue gives the brief biography, from adolescence to the point where his planet is destroyed, of Rat Korga. He is an all-but-slave whose culture permitted synapse jamming, a sort of electronic mental manipulation, which supplied it with a lot of nearly mindless labor, some of it voluntary. However, the process is, in ways, reversible.

The major part of the novel is told by one Marq Dyeth, an Industrial Diplomat (don't ask), in ten "Monologues" (here I quibble with Delany, whose finesse with language leads one to think his use of the word *monologue* would indicate something theatrical and soliloquizing; it's really ten chapters in the first person). Marq, by accident (?), becomes involved with Korga and the mystery of the destruction of his world. Was it Cultural Fugue (I *told* you not to ask)? Or perhaps the mysterious X1v, the only space-traveling alien race encountered by humans, and with whom communication has never been established?

This, though, is not the core of the novel; that is the relationship between Marq and Korga, who are each other's perfect erotic objects . . . to about seven decimal places. (That's the kind of thing one can find out from a General Information web.) It all might be called a comedy–drama of manners, the manners being those of six thousand different worlds (and cultures), which the reader is told

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about (and sometimes exposed to, but *not* told about) in extraordinary and endless detail. The climax is a multi-cultural formal dinner, the maddest party since Alice's friends got out the teacups.

If all this sounds complicated, confusing, and dense, it is that. Delany packs more ideas in one chapter than most authors use in a whole novel. *But*—if you don't mind being confused and having to work a little, and if you want something more than the latest Star Trek novel to stretch your mind, all the effort is well worth it. One finishes *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* as one finishes a visit to a new and strange country—with some experiences and impressions intact, and a host of fragmentary ideas, unanswered questions, and evocative pictures. My guess is that it will be the prestige SF novel of the year, one of those books like *The Name of the Rose* which many will buy, few will finish, and the rest will lie about.

Dinner at Deviant's Palace
By Tim Powers
Ace, $2.95 (paper)

Maybe Tim Powers should stay in the past.

No, I'm not suggesting that the talented author of *The Anubis Gates* be marooned in the Pliocene Age (the currently fashionable place to be marooned in time, thanks to Julian May) or even in the early 19th century, as was his hero in *Gates* (which was one of the surprise hits of a year ago). But his two last novels have taken place in the past (*The Drawing of the Dark* is set at the siege of Vienna) and winning stories they were. His latest, *Dinner at Deviant's Palace,* is set in the future, and it's not quite so successful.

It's another anarchic future, about a century post-holocaust. On the California coast are a series of small, self-governing towns, living mostly on salvage, and fighting among themselves. There are two major powers in this messy scene. One is the Jaybirds, a religious cult started by a messiah called Jaybush with a center at the Holy City of Irvine. The other is a less organized segment of society based on "Blood," a heroin-like drug whose culture centers in Venice (California, of course) where also is the notorious nightclub called Deviant's Palace.

Rivas is a star musician in the remnants of metropolis now called Ellay; in the past he had been a redemptionist, one who specializes in rescuing those kidnapped and indoctrinated by the Jaybirds and who risk life, limb, and sanity in doing so (the Jaybirds play rough). He is offered an impossibly large sum to do one more redemption, which he accepts on learning that it is Urania, his lost love of thirteen years ago whose wealthy father tossed him out as not good enough for her.

Rivas allows himself to be dragooned by the Jaybirds and finds that he is more susceptible to their methods than he used to be, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leads to a series of discoveries, escapes, and reinfiltrations. Finally making it to the Holy City without coming across Urania, he learns of a hitherto unknown connection between the Jaybirds and the Deviant's Palace. On to Venice!

All of this is not so turgid as it sounds, and there is an undercurrent of mystery. Rivas is followed constantly by a "hemogoblin," a psychic vampire that lives on blood, and which seems to want to take over his identity. And why are the followers of Jaybush now babbling in English during "communion" where once they used to speak in tongues? Tuning into this, Rivas begins to suspect the true alien nature of the "Messiah" Jaybush which, of course, culminates in a confrontation at dinner at Deviant's Palace.

This is all enlivened with some antic characters and scenes; I liked the point at which Rivas, for reasons much too complicated to go into, jumps off a hundred-foot-high building into the ocean twice in a row.

But this is a future that doesn't hang together very well; you don't feel that it's solid. When Powers has a structured reality to play with, i.e. the past, the resulting complications just get madder and funnier. But here he wrestles with the problem of creating a world (of the future) in toto, and the strain shows; somehow he doesn't seem to have the energy left to take off and have fun. And while there's a serious and commendable effort to show Rivas as a three dimensional character, struggling with his obsession with Urania and forced by the struggles of his search for her to grow up, this aspect of the novel doesn't fit too comfortably with the others.

But even if this isn't super-Powers, there's enough style and originality here to show that he's still an author to keep very much in mind for the future.

Mr Pye
By Mervyn Peake
Overlook Press, $15.95

Some months ago, I was astonished to see one of the columnists of the English magazine *Punch* refer to a "a dark and Peakish night." This was not even in one of the literary or arts columns; it was, in fact, in the space devoted to food (which is written, curiously enough —but not for the English—by a member of Parliament).

This was the clincher in my growing awareness that the English have firmly established Mervyn Peake in their pantheon of geniuses. There has been yet another book about Peake just published over there, and those books by other authors which he illustrated in his inimitable style are being re-issued. Now he is an adjective—which assumes that most of one's peers will understand what is implied by that usage. (The only American writer of fantasy so taken for granted as part of our culture is Lovecraft, as in Lovecraftian —and I don't even see that turning

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up in a food column in a popular magazine.)

What is shameful is that there is *nothing* by Mervyn Peake available in this country in paperback, not even his great work, the fantasy which is like nothing else, the Gormenghast trilogy *(Titus Groan, Gormenghast,* and *Titus Alone)* which is considered even on this benighted side of the Atlantic to be one of the landmarks of the genre. This is a shocking state of affairs, mitigated only by the fact that the trilogy *is* available in hard cover editions (and very handsome ones, too, with Peake's own unnerving illustrations).

Now we have—in hard cover—another of Peake's novels, *Mr Pye,* which to my knowledge has never been published in the U.S. Very different from the trilogy, it's small-scaled, something of a fable with swipes at religion. Mr Pye is a do-gooder, one of those benevolent people determined to convert everyone to love and God, to whom he refers as The Great Pal. Peake captures it perfectly by noting that he was never ill and "did not really believe in pain, but was full of compassion for those who imagined themselves to be suffering."

At the height of his do-gooding among the inhabitants of one of the smaller Channel Islands, Mr Pye suddenly begins to sprout wings—angel-type wings. The results are a peculiarly Peakish mixture of hilarity and savagery, with the devastating, underplayed wit at which the English have always excelled.

Don't expect the epic scenes and horrors that are to be found on a visit to Gormenghast, but Peake's gallery of eccentric characters and unexpected incidents are in full use, if on a lesser scale.

Mr Pye, incidentally, in its subtle play with good, evil, and religion, makes an interesting contrast to a recent fable dealing—very differently—with the same things, from a major SF writer.

This edition, it must be noted, also has Peake's own illustrations. (As those of you unfamiliar with his work must have gathered by now, he was a painter and illustrator of great distinction, as well as novelist *and* poet.) Any Peake, in any form, is welcome, but I say, old chaps, let's start a movement to get Peake back in paperback on this side of the water.

The Color Out of Time
By Michael Shea
DAW, $2.75 (paper)

Speaking of Lovecraftian, H.P. Lovecraft's most memorable story, "The Colour Out of Space," begins with his most memorable opening: "West of Arkham the hills rise wild, and there are valleys with deep woods that no axe has ever cut. There are dark narrow glens where the trees slope fantastically, and where thin brooklets trickle without ever having caught the glint of sunlight." I quote this from sheer self-indulgence, because I love it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

More germane to this review is a passage near the end of the story: "And because Ammi recognized that colour, and knew that this last faint remnant must still lurk down there in the well, he has never been quite right since. . . . It is forty-four years now since the horror happened, but he has never been back there, and will be glad when the new reservoir blots it out . . . I hope the water shall be very deep, but even so, I shall never drink it."

Has there ever been anyone to read those words that did not wonder, just for an instant, what that reservoir would be like? To shudder slightly at the idea of a man-made lake covering a farm on which something from the inimical outer voids had landed, which over a matter of months had infected everything on that rural establishment in the most horrendous ways?

Well, Michael Shea has answered that question in a new novel called, appropriately enough, *The Color Out of Time* (why couldn't the flavorful Lovecraftian spelling—"colour"—have been preserved, one wonders). And he's pulled it off rather well (no pun intended, for those who have read the original).

Two elderly professors take a summer vacation on a lake in New England which has become a minor leisure attraction, with minimal but adequate facilities for boating and camping at one end, but which is otherwise more or less deserted, its shores being unpropitiously steep for building. The two, keen observers that they are, begin to notice odd things about the lake—the peculiar colors that play on its surface and the way the trees on its shores move in strange ways when there is no wind.

And we're off, building to a climax of horror (sorry for the cliché—no other phrase would do in this case) worse than any nature-lover could wish on a crowd of vulgar, beer-swilling tourists with noisy boats. (Regrettably, a couple of park rangers get in the way, too.) Even aside from its esthetically satisfying aspects, it's a really good climax of horror as climaxes of horror go, with that slightly hallucinogenic quality at which the old masters, such as Lovecraft and Merritt, were so expert.

One is usually smart to stay clear of spin-offs of the classics, but once in a rare while, they work. Shea is no Lovecraft, and doesn't pretend to be, though he does a neat job of catching HPL's slightly prissy, archaic style without pushing it. But he told me what I wanted to know about the future of that reservoir, and did so without violating my memory of the great original. *Well* done! (Inside joke.)

The Silver Horse
By Elizabeth A. Lynn
Bluejay, $9.95

There are mutterings in various quarters (including this one) of the distinctly juvenile turn that so much fantasy and SF publishing seems to have taken lately, but this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

does not in any way do away with the hope of coming across one of the transcendent children's books that have become classics of fantasy over the years, and are discovered and read by those of any age with that special sense of magic. The greatest of these is, of course, *The Hobbit* (at least before it and the trilogy became A Thing); other examples of less fame that can be cited are Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows,* John Masefield's *The Midnight Folk,* C.S. Lewis's Narnia books, and almost anything by E. Nesbit.

So when a fine writer of adult fantasy brings forth a children's book, one has a certain sense of anticipation, qualified by the fact that this kind of book needs a very special talent indeed. No matter how great a writer's talents in other directions, he or she may not have it in this one—I'm sure Marcel Proust couldn't have written *The Wind in the Willows* ("Mole, bring on some madeleines and tea . . . "!!!).

Elizabeth Lynn is, Lord knows, one of the definitely adult writers in the field, dealing with complex emotions in complex other worlds. Perhaps that's the problem—her book for children, *The Silver Horse,* feels written down; there's a sense of strain in its simplification, and it reads like an intelligent adult's *idea* of what a children's book should be rather than an original creation.

Again, it must be pointed out that we're asking for something rare and special; if what we get is a perfectly good children's book, there's no cause for complaint. I don't claim to be an expert on what children will like (and frankly distrust any adults who do), and this might be just the ticket for youngsters in search of fantasy at their level. It's about a contemporary little girl in San Francisco who, with her best friend, gets swept away to Dreamland in pursuit of her little brother, who has been kidnapped by the Silver Horse of the Dreamkeeper. They make their way through the Land of Runaway Toys, where they meet a rather endearing giant teddy bear and some menacing dolls reminiscent of those in *Barbarella;* they encounter a witch and, with her help, penetrate the Dreamkeeper's Hill and confront the Dreamkeeper.

There's something of a dichotomy between the *very* up-to-date Susannah and her friend Danny (whose favorite adjectives are "bitchin" and "boss"), and the rather old-fashioned idea of Dreamland and a Land of Runaway Toys. Maybe this is the point, to place some modern kids in the old situations. I'll leave it up to the real modern kids to make up their own minds.

Yesterday's Tomorrows
By Joseph J. Corn
& Brian Horrigan
Summit Books, $29.95, $17.95 (paper)

I'll take yesterday's futures against today's anytime. Remember when the future was a place of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hope, when everyone would have a spiffy white tunic with shoulders out to *here* and two helicopters in every garage? Those of us past a certain age can claim to have met the future (1984 was as far away to 1944 as 2024 is to 1984) and, boy, is it a bust! Computers and frozen food are a poor exchange for those white tunics.

Every time period has a particular idea of the future. Science fiction's has certainly changed over the years; no period viewed the near future as dourly as does ours. This holds true of the visual arts too, and *Yesterday's Tomorrows,* by Joseph J. Corn and Brian Horrigan, is a potpourri of artists' ideas of what the future would look like, as well as pop artifacts such as toy ray guns and Buck Rogers "transceivers."

The book is based on an exhibition developed by the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Service, which was shown at the Institute in Washington. It won my heart with the frontispiece: an Earle Bergey cover for an issue of *Captain Future,* one of the pulpiest pulps ever, and a classic example of the BEM and pickle-jar space helmet school of SF art. There are other illustrations from genre magazines, but also from many sources outside the field, going back for a century. The prize is an exquisite drawing of a future cityscape by William Robinson Leigh, used as a magazine illustration in 1908. There is also an intelligent text—perhaps too much of one. I could have used even more of the wonderful pictures.

Earthblood
By Keith Laumer
& Rosel George Brown
Bluejay, $7.95 (paper)

Keith Laumer and Rosel George Brown's *Earthblood* was first published in 1966, which was back when science fiction was fun. There was a period there when the exuberant conventions of space opera combined with a certain amount of sophistication and a slightly higher level of writing skill to result in minor classics such as Schmitz's *Witches of Karres* and Panshin's "Thurb" novels.

Earthblood was more or less on the tail end of this jolly era, and already shows signs of the darker, "meaner" SF that characterized the "new wave" a-coming. For instance, slaughter abounds; major characters are zapped right and left, and the spear carriers are done in, in hordes. (This happened in Smith and Burroughs, too, but always for a good cause, such as saving the universe for democracy, or saving Dejah Thoris's virtue. Here the cause is a good deal more ambiguous.)

Laumer and Brown create a very busy and complicated universe many millennia in the future; man had been spacefaring for thirty thousand years. "Had" is the operative word; the true Terran and Terra itself are practically mythical at the time of the story. The chaotically diverse inhabitants of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the many worlds are divided into "gooks" and "geeks" by those few who have enough Earthblood to at least appear human: "gooks" are humanoid, probably mutated earth stock; "geeks" are out and out aliens, of one of a score of races discovered by humans in their initial expansion through the Galaxy.

Terra had had the leadership of the Galaxy, culturally and politically. But five thousand years ago a warlike alien race suddenly appeared, also spacefaring. A thousand-year war was fought, the end result being a blockade of Terra by the Niss, and the multiple races of the galaxy relapsed into an almost anarchic Babel.

Roan lives with his foster parents, who are mutated Earth stock, in a slum on Tambool, in the gracyl quarter. As he grows up, he becomes aware that he is in appearance pure Terran, and from hints from his parents and his "Uncle" T'hoy Hoy, a Yill, suspects that he is, indeed, pure stock. When he is almost grown, he is kidnapped into an interstellar circus (the "Grand Vorplisch Extravaganzoo"), and the odyssey is on!

At whirlwind speed, Roan is catapulted through this slightly dippy Galaxy, going from circus freak to space pirate to officer in the Imperial Terran Navy (in exile, what's left of it). Finding Terra becomes an obsession, since it will solve the mystery of his antecedents, not to mention the mystery of Earth itself. He encounters the mysterious Niss (if they conquered the Galaxy, why are they so hard to find?). And, of course, he eventually makes it to Terra, where things, need it be said, are Not What They Seem.

I can't think of a speedier novel (it has the pace of a *Startide Rising)* and the inventive kaleidoscope of races and places the authors have come up with keep things consistently interesting. *Earthblood* is another good oldie that can hold its own with the best of the new.

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (From page 112)

SECOND SOLUTION TO BAR BETS ON THE BAGEL

"I'm wrong," said Pulver. "Make that next drink a double Marstini."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET PLACE

ISAAC ASIMOV — is published 13 times a year. The rate for CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS is $2.20 per word — payable in advance — minimum ad $33.00. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

SCIENCE Fiction/fantasy. Free catalog of pulps, digests, paperbacks, hardcovers. Collections also purchased. Ray Bowman, Box 5845A, Toledo, Ohio 43613.

FRANK KELLY FREAS: A SEPARATE STAR. Special Edition, numbered, signed, slip-case, tipped in print, $39.95. Hardcover $24.95; Paperback $14.95. Ppd. Check, M.O., VISA/MasterCard. Kelly Freas, 4216- Blackwater Road, Virginia Beach, VA. 23457. (804) 421-3397.

ALL Available paperbacks, hardcovers supplied quickly & efficiently. Worldwide service since 1973. Quarterly catalogue, free US/CANADA; $1 elsewhere. THE SCIENCE FICTION SHOP, 56 EIGHTH AVE., NY, NY 10014.

54 years of ASTOUNDING/ANALOG back issues are once again available–on microfiche. Including complete index, color covers, and reader. These are high quality, inexpensive, unedited copies of the original issues. Write or call for more information and your FREE SAMPLE. M.I.C., P.O. Box 2163, Dept. AA, Dallas, Texas 75221 (214) 824-3969.

SEX IN THE BIBLE. Complete report. Entertaining, factual, sometimes shocking. Unique look into little known subject. $6.00 ppd. Bible, Box A-1203, Winona, Minn. 55987.

THE MAGE, Colgate University's Journal of SF/F. Send submissions; reserve your copy for $1.50 ppd at THE MAGE, CU Box 822, Hamilton, NY 13346.

EDUCATION AND INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES By Mail!!...Accredited Bachelors, Masters, PhD's. Free Facts Revealed. Careers-AS4, Box 470886, Tulsa OK 74147.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

FREE dealership!! Receive $25.00 orders keep $15.00! Hottest pulling circular around! For complete FREE dealership send long stamped self-addressed envelope: Worldwide #18, Box 15940, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

SELL $5 antigravity device at 400% profit. Captures free energy from perpetually spinning electrons. Make thousands from selling experiment or millions from 300% efficient alternator experiment proves possible. Details—SASE to: Ecklin, 6143K Edsall, Alexandria, VA 22304.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

FREE PRIVACY BOOK CATALOG. Discover latest low-profile techniques. Hide assets. Get secret loans. Keep mail, telephone confidential. Eden, Box 8410-AD, Fountain Valley, CA 92728.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people, 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

TAPES & CASSETTES

Science Fiction Radio shows on reg. cassettes. Send for catalog 50¢: John Ford, 411 Truitt St., Salisbury, MD 21801.

TOYS, GAMES, & ENTERTAINMENT

NEW multi-player play by mail. Strategic space game. 510 Fleets, 255 Systems, change system connectors, $2.50 per turn. Novice games available. Send $2.00 for rule books. Avatar Games, Box 1168, Boynton Beach, FL 33435-1168.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

As colleges head toward Spring break, it's the time for on-campus conventions. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a later, longer list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273–6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing cons. When phoning cons, give your name and business first off (most numbers are homes). Look for me at cons with the iridescent "Filthy Pierre" badge.

MARCH, 1985

15–17—**NorWesCon.** For info, write: **Box 24207, Seattle WA 98124.** Or phone: **(206) 723–2101** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Seattle WA (if city omitted, same as in address) at the SeaTac Red Lion Inn. Guests will include: Brian Aldiss, Robert Silverberg, Greg Benford, artist Jack Gaughan, fan rich brown. Over 100 pros (authors, etc.) usually attend.

15–17—**LunaCon.** LaGuardia Sheraton, Queens NY. Gordon R. Dickson, Don Maitz, Curt Clemmer. The dowager queen of East Coast cons (at one time, the only large East Coast con; it's smaller now).

16–17—**CapriConWest, Box 598, Gardena CA 90247.** (213) 516–0668 or (714) 995–3083.

21–24—**AggieCon. (409) 845–1515 (ask for Cepheid Variable).** College Station, TX. A&M U. campus.

22–24—**MidSouthCon.** Quality Inn Airport, Memphis TN. Frederik Pohl, artist Keith Berdak, Sharon Webb, fan Ken Moore. The notorious Maskerade, as well as a banquet and a 24-hour party room.

22–24—**StellarCon, Box 4, Elliot Univ. Center, U. of NC, Greensboro NC 27412.** Held on campus.

22–24—**GeneriCon, c/o Rensselaer SF Assoc., Box 66 Rensselaer Union, Troy NY 12181.** On campus.

29–31—**IstaCon 2, 959-A Waverly Ct., Norcross GA 30071.** C. L. Grant, Kathy Ptacek, Jerry Page, fan Ken Moore. Put on by fans of Anne (Pern) McCaffrey. All-you-can-eat banquet & jacuzzi parties.

APRIL, 1985

5–7—**MiniCon, Box 2128 Loop Sta., Minneapolis MN 55402.** James Hogan, S. Sucharitkul. A tradition.

5–7—**YorKon III, % Ford, 45 Harlod Mnt., Leeds LS6 1PW, UK.** The British annual con. Greg Benford.

5–7—**LepreCon, Box 16815, Phoenix AZ 85011. (602) 968–5749.** G. Harry Stine (Lee Correy), Dowling.

5–7—**BaltiCon, % BSFS, Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203.** Back out at the suburban Hunt Valley Inn.

AUGUST, 1985

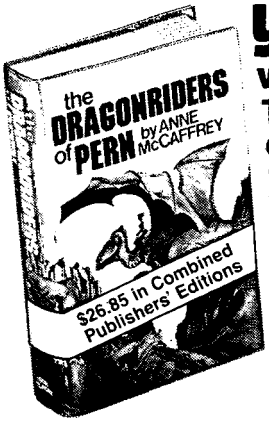
22–26—**AussieCon Two, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. #1, Culver City CA 90230.** Melbourne, Australia. The WorldCon for 1985. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, editor/fan Ted White. Guests too numerous to mention.

30–Sep. 2—**ChiliCon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766.** The North American SF Interim Con for 1985.

AUGUST, 1986

28–Sep. 1—**ConFederation, 2500 N. Atlanta #1986, Smyrna GA 30080. (404) 438–3943.** Atlanta GA. Ray ("Martian Chronicles") Bradbury, fan/editor Terry Carr, Bob (Slow Glass) Shaw. The WorldCon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



YOURS FREE with membership The DRAGONRIDERS of PERN

One mammoth edition including all 3 novels: *Dragonflight, Dragonquest,* and *The White Dragon.*

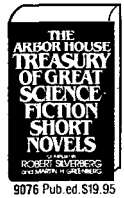
†1289 Spec.ed.

1131 Spec.ed.

1479 Pub.ed.$7.95

1446 Pub.ed.$16.95

1347 Spec.ed.



9076 Pub.ed.$19.95

1388 Pub.ed.$15.95

1073 Pub.ed.$11.95

1461 The Goblin Tower; The Clocks of Iraz; The Unbeheaded King. Spec.ed.

1420 Includes the First, Second, and Third Books. Spec.ed.

0752 Elric of Melnibone; The Sailor on the Seas of Fate; The Weird of the White Wolf. Spec.ed.

1172 The Vanishing Tower; The Bane of the Black Sword; Stormbringer. Spec.ed.

And take 4 more for $1 WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

How the Club Works:

You'll receive your 4 books for only $1 (plus shipping and handling) after your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, you may examine the books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days at Club expense. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $4.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—up to 65% off. The Club offers more than 300 books to choose from. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

†©1984 By Paramount Pictures Corp. All Rights Reserved.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Dept. RR 625, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Please accept my application for membership. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below plus my FREE book and bill me just $1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices during the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. The FREE book will be mine to keep whether or not I remain a member. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

FREE BOOK #2543	1.	2.	3.	4.

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

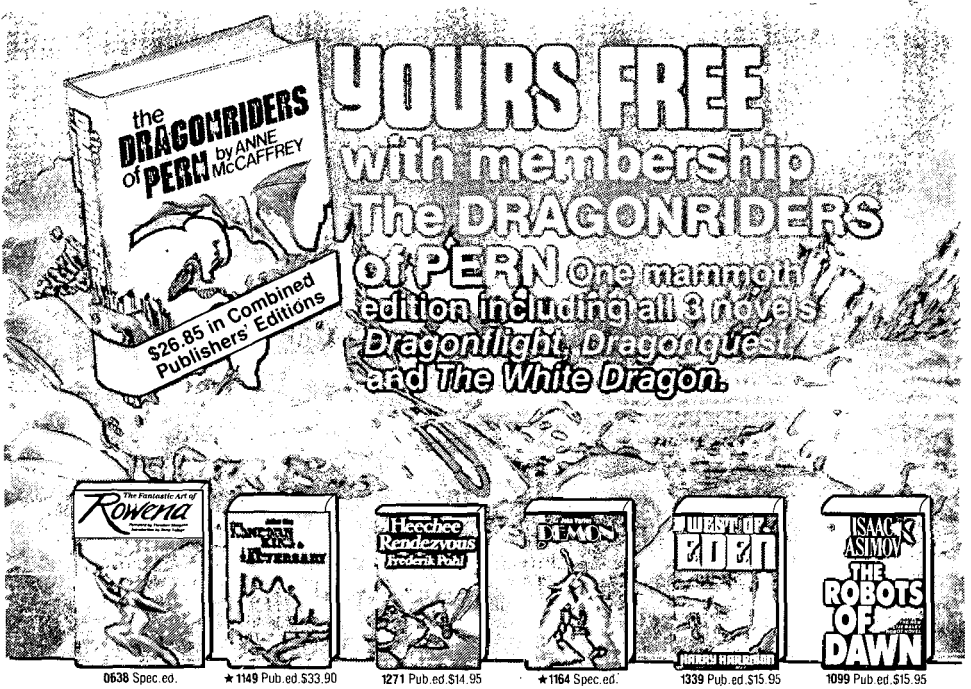
City _____

State _____ Zip _____

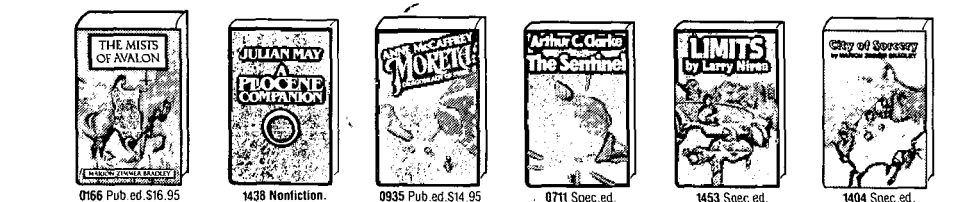
If under 18, parent must sign. _____

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada. 86-S233M

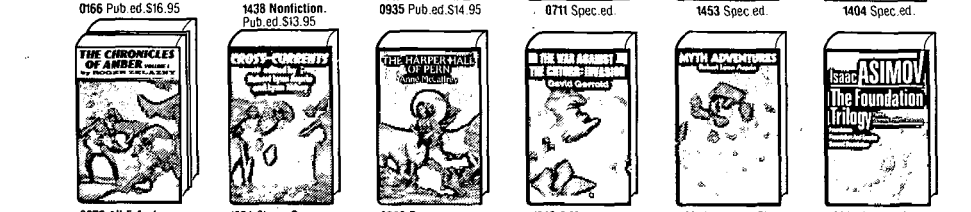
LICENSED FOR PERSONAL USE ONLY
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


the DRAGONRIDERS of PERN by ANNE McCAFFREY
$26.85 in Combined Publishers' Editions
YOURS FREE
with membership
The DRAGONRIDERS of PERN One mammoth edition including all 3 novels Dragonlight, Dragonquest and The White Dragon.

0638 Spec.ed. ★1149 Pub.ed.$33.90 1271 Pub.ed.$14.95 ★1164 Spec.ed. 1339 Pub.ed.$15.95 1099 Pub.ed.$15.95



0166 Pub.ed.$16.95 1438 Nonfiction. Pub.ed.$13.95 0935 Pub.ed.$14.95 0711 Spec.ed. 1453 Spec.ed. 1404 Spec.ed.



0075 All 5 Amber novels. 2 vols. Comb.pub.ed.$32.30 1354 Storm Season: The Face of Chaos; Wings of Omen. Spec.ed. 0992 Dragonsong; Dragonsinger; Dragondrums. Comb.pub.ed.$38.85. 1248 A Matter for Men; A Day for Damnation. Comb.pub.ed.$33.90 0943 Another Fine Myth; Myth Conceptions; Myth Directions; Hit or Myth. Spec.ed. 6221 Foundation; Foundation and Empire; Second Foundation. Pub.ed.$17.95

AND TAKE 4 MORE FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP

See other side for coupon and additional Selections.

THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

86-S233M

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices. *Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED